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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساہ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 2 MARCH 2024 |SATURDAY|BENGALURU| 21 SHABAN, 1445 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 45| Pages: 8

Bomb blast rocks B'luru's Rameshwaram Cafe

- **9 injured as the blast took place during lunch hours in the tech hub of Whitefield**
- **Explosion is suspected to be from a bag placed at the location**
- **Case registered under UAPA and Explosive Substances Act**

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

An explosion rocked Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru's Whitefield on Friday, injuring at least 10 people. Bengaluru Police have registered a case under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Explosive Substances Act at HAL police station.

The blast occurred around 1:30pm, during the busy lunch hour. "A young man of about 28-30 years came to the cafe, purchased Rava Idli at the counter, placed the bag near a tree (adjacent to the cafe) and left. After one hour the blast occurred," Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said. "It was a bomb blast with a low intensity or impact. He had fixed a timer for the blast to happen after one hour."

A CCTV video of the incident showed an explosion, leading to smoke and panic-stricken customers and others fleeing the place. The fire and rescue, and police personnel arrived at the spot, and the injured, which included employees and customers, were shifted to nearby hospitals.

Police suspect that a bag at the eatery with a possible improvised explosive device (IED) could have exploded, even as NIA and IB have been apprised of the matter. Officials from the local unit of National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrived at the spot.

Police have recovered some nuts and a bag carrying batteries from the spot. They are verifying the identity cards found at the location. The authorities are suspecting that the act could be a fallout of business rivalry.

The blast site has been cordoned off and police are reviewing CCTV footage from the cafe and surrounding areas, while the bomb squad and forensics team are on the job as well.

The authorities have also gathered information from the locals about the suspicious movement of two people before the explosion.

Initially, it was reported to be a cylinder blast, according to Whitefield Fire Station. "At 1.08pm on Friday, Fire Department received a call about an LPG leakage fire in the cafe. When our officers and teams reached the spot, there was no fire or flame.

A bag which was lying behind a woman who was sitting with six other customers at the eatery exploded. It is suspected that the explosion could have been caused due to some object in that bag," said TN Shivashankar, Director of Karnataka State Fire and Emergency Services Department.

Director General of Police Alok Mohan and City Police Commissioner B Dayananda also visited the spot. Mohan described the explosion as a "bomb blast" and said nobody was seriously injured. "We will certainly identify who did it," he said.

Divya Raghavendra Rao, Co-Founder & Managing Director of Rameshwaram Café, said the blast occurred in the area where customers wash their hands. Rao said they were cooperating with law enforcement agencies and provided them with full access to CCTV footage. "We don't have enemies or any professional rivalry," she said.

Rao said: "I am currently in Hyderabad as I gave birth to a baby two months ago, therefore, I am unable to be physically present at the location."

Edison, an eyewitness, said, "I was waiting outside the eatery for my turn when suddenly we heard a loud noise... an explosion. We got scared not knowing what it was. There were around 35-40 people at the eatery. They all started rushing out and there was absolute chaos. They started saying a cylinder exploded, but we don't know exactly what happened."

—Salar News with Agencies

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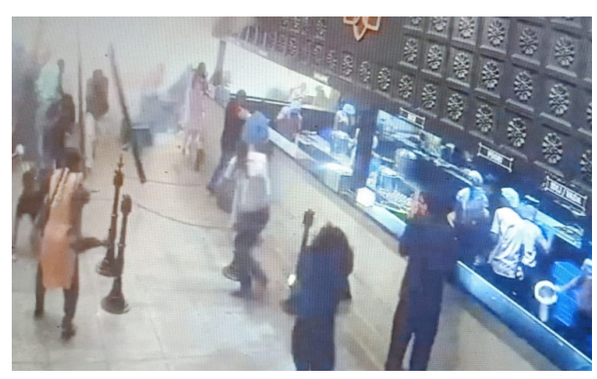

Clockwise from top: Bomb disposal Squad and FSL team members investigate at the Rameshwaram Cafe premises after a blast, in Bengaluru, on Friday; CCTV footage of the blast; Staffers and customers run for cover after the blast ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Paytm Bank fined Rs 5.5cr for money laundering

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

In fresh trouble for Paytm Payments Bank, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) has slapped a penalty of Rs 5.49 crore on the digital bank for violating anti-money laundering law, the finance ministry said on Friday. The Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) has been in trouble after the Reserve Bank directed it to stop accepting fresh deposits from customers with effect from 29 February -- a deadline which was later extended to 15 March. Earlier this week, Vijay Shekhar Sharma stepped down as part-time non-executive Chairman of PPBL and the board of the bank was reconstituted. The Finance Ministry said FIU-India had initiated a review of Paytm Payments Bank on receipt of specific information from law enforcement agencies in respect of a few entities and their network of businesses engaged in illegal acts, including organising and facilitating online gambling. The money generated from these illegal operations, i.e. proceeds of crime were routed and channelled through bank accounts maintained by these entities with the Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, said the ministry..*—PTI*

Sukhu faces flak for inviting disqualified MLAs back

SHIMLA, 1 MAR

Amid mega political turmoil in the state of Himachal Pradesh, Leader of Opposition Jairam Thakur shrugged his shoulders about the current state of affairs and claimed that whatever is happening, is the sole responsibility of the Congress.Mocking Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu for inviting back the six disqualified Congress MLAs, Thakur said, "There can be no bigger joke than this. Perhaps the CM is unable to understand clearly that what is being said. There is such a situation now that he is fearful that the government is going to go away; MLAs are leaving his side. The political situation in Himachal Pradesh is such that whatever the Congress high command may say, things have not settled yet and there is no possibility of that happening.*—PTI*

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In Bengal, PM tears into TMC over Sandeshkhali

ARAMBAGH, 1 MAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday attacked the Mamata Banerjee-led government in West Bengal over the Sandeshkhali issue and said the entire country is "ashamed" and seething with anger over sexual atrocities against women by TMC leaders there.

Addressing a public meeting at Arambagh in Hooghly district, Modi also criticised the opposition bloc INDIA for keeping silent on the Sandeshkhali atrocities. He likened the inaction of the opposition alliance to the "three monkeys" of Mahatma Gandhi.

"The whole country is sad and is seething with anger after seeing what the TMC, which beats the drum of Maa, Mati, and Manush, has done to the sisters of Sandeshkhali. The TMC leader crossed all limits of audacity with the sisters and daughters in Sandeshkhali" he said.

Modi urged the people of Bengal to respond to the wounds they were inflicted with by casting their votes against the TMC. "Will you forgive such a party, will you forgive TMC? You have to reply to every pain that they have caused to you through your votes," he said. The defeat in LS polls will start the countdown of TMC's farewell from the state, Modi asserted.

Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister, who is on a two-day visit to West Bengal, inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for projects worth Rs 7,200 crore in the Arambagh area. Criticising the state administration for failing to arrest Shajahan for nearly two months after the attack on Enforcement Directorate officials during a raid at his residence on 5 January, Modi said, "The fact that he remained absconding for nearly two months, someone must be there who must be protecting him."

—PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday ***PHOTO: ANI***

ANNOUNCEMENT ON 3 MARCH

Farmers say 'Delhi Chalo' stir to go on

CHANDIGARH, 1 MAR

Farmer leaders on Friday asserted that their "Delhi Chalo" agitation will continue till demands are met, saying they will announce their next course of action on 3 March after a prayer meeting for a farmer who died during clashes with Haryana security personnel in Khanauri.

They said the existing 'morchas' of farmers at the Shambhu and Khanauri borders will be strengthened and farmers will also hold a sit-in protest in Dabwali in support of their demands.

Speaking to reporters at the Shambhu border, farmer leaders Manjeet Singh Rai and Jaswinder Singh Longowal said the next announcement will be made after the final prayers at Shubhkaran Singh's native village Balloh in Bathinda district.

Shubhkaran Singh was killed and around 12 police personnel were injured in clashes at the Khanauri border point on the Punjab-Haryana border on February 21.

Replying to a question on the farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' call, Longowal said it still stands.

He also hit out at the Centre and the Haryana government for using "oppressive methods" against farmers holding a peaceful protest.

"It is not just the question of using teargas or mild lathi-charge... we have seen them use toxic gases and everyone knows how we lost Shubhkaran," Longowal said. "In a democracy, is it justified that bullets are fired...At the same time, one thing is clear, we have to save our children from bullets," he said. Farmer leader, Sarwan Singh Pandher, said the government was not paying attention to farmers' demands as the ruling party's sole focus was on winning the Lok Sabha elections ahead. *—PTI*

Woman's naked parade clip viral, probe on

BELAGAVI, 1 MAR

The video of a woman who was allegedly paraded nude around seven months ago has recently gone viral.

Based on the complaint by the survivor's daughter, the police said on Thursday that they have taken up the case for investigation.

The incident occurred on 31 July, 2023 when the survivor and her son were beaten up by her rivals for questioning the encroachment of half an acre of land on the three acres of land allotted to her by the government.

The accused not only paraded her nude but also beat up her family, but also threatened her with dire consequences if she complained.

Senior officers of Belagavi district administration have camped in the village to probe it further.

This incident is a reminder of a similar one that took place in Vantamuri village in Belagavi district where a woman was attacked on 11 December, 2023 after her son eloped with a girl from his community. *—PTI*

The accused not only paraded her nude but also beat up her family ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Defence Ministry signs 5 major deals worth Rs 39,125 cr

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

India on Friday sealed five major defence acquisition contracts worth Rs 39,125 crore as a part of efforts to boost the combat capabilities of the armed forces. The mega procurement projects were firmed up amid India's lingering border row with China in eastern Ladakh, and they will be implemented under the broad framework of the government's policy to boost domestic defence manufacturing.

The contracts were exchanged in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane.

Out of the five contracts, one was with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for procurement of Aero-engines for MiG-29 aircraft, second with Larsen and Toubro Limited for procurement of Close-in Weapon System (CIWS) and procurement of High-Power Radar (HPR) and two with BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited (BAPL) for procurement of BrahMos missiles and procurement of Shipborne BrahMos system for the Indian Defence Forces.

The contract for RD-33 Aero Engines for MiG-29 aircraft has been signed with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for Rs 5,249.72 crore. These aero engines are expected to fulfill the need of Indian Air Force (IAF) to sustain the operational capability of the MiG-29 fleet for the residual service life.

The contract for CIWS has been signed with Larsen and Toubro Limited for Rs 7,668.82 crore.

CIWS will provide terminal air defence to select locations of the country.

—PTI/ANI

'BETRAYED HUMANITY'

Musk sues OpenAI, Altman

SAN FRANCISCO, 1 MAR

Elon Musk is suing OpenAI and its CEO Sam Altman over what he says is a betrayal of the ChatGPT maker's founding aims of benefiting humanity rather than pursuing profits.

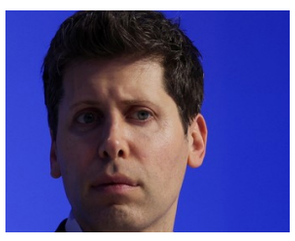
In a lawsuit filed at San Francisco Superior Court, billionaire Musk said that when he bankrolled OpenAI's creation, he secured an agreement with Altman and Greg Brockman, the president, to keep the AI company as a non-profit that would develop technology for the benefit of the public.

Under its founding agreement, OpenAI would also make its code open to the public instead of walling it off for any private company's gains, the lawsuit says.

However, by embracing a close relationship with Microsoft, OpenAI and its top executives have set that pact "aflame" and are "perverting" the company's mission, Musk alleges in the lawsuit.

"OpenAI, Inc. has been transformed into a closed-source de facto subsidiary of the largest technology company in the world: Microsoft," the lawsuit filed Thursday says. "Under its new Board, it is not just developing but is actually refining an AGI to maximize profits for Microsoft, rather than for the benefit of humanity."

AGI refers to artificial general intelligence, which are general purpose AI systems that can perform just as well as or even better than humans in a wide variety of tasks. Musk is suing over breach of contract, breach of fiduciary duty and unfair business practices. He also wants an injunction to prevent anyone, including Microsoft, from benefiting from OpenAI's technology. *—PTI*



Elon Musk and Sam Altman ***PHOTOS: ANI***

- However, by embracing a close relationship with Microsoft, OpenAI and its top executives have set that pact "aflame" and are "perverting" the company's mission, Musk alleges in the lawsuit.

India, China in talks to settle Ladakh standoff: Beijing Army

BEIJING, 1 MAR

China and India have maintained "constructive communication" to find a mutually acceptable solution to resolve the standoff in eastern Ladakh, the Chinese military has said, underlining that Beijing attaches "great importance" to ties with New Delhi to jointly maintain peace at the borders.

The Indian and Chinese troops are locked in a standoff in certain friction points in eastern Ladakh even as the two sides completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks.

"China attaches great importance to the China-India military-to-military relations and hopes that India and China will work towards the same goal, enhance mutual trust, properly settle differences," a officials was quoted as saying by China Military Online, the official news portal of the Chinese Defence Ministry.

The talks held on 19 February were the 21st round of talks between the two militaries to resolve the eastern Ladakh logjam.

The Chinese military action in May 2020 resulted in the Galwan Valley clash that marked the most serious military conflict between India and China in decades. According to the Chinese military, the two sides have so far agreed to disengage at four points -- the Galwan Valley, the Pangong Lake, Hot Springs, and Jianan Daban (Gogra) -- contributing to the de-escalation of tensions along the border. But the talks were deadlocked over reaching a similar agreement at Depsang and Demchok, where the Indian side strongly pressed for resolution of two lingering issues. *—PTI*

Motor illegally drawing water from KRS removed

MANDYA, 1 MAR

Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited removed a pump set installed at KRS reservoir at Srirangapatna taluk in Mandya district which has been illegally withdrawing water to a nearby farmhouse.The farmhouse, located adjacent to the backwaters of KRS Dam, has installed motors and pipes extending around 200 metres into the reservoir. They were cultivating crops using the water drawn from the reservoir. Residents have alleged that despite bringing the matter to the attention of Cauvery Irrigation Corporation officials, no action has been taken against the perpetrators. CNNL officials Assistant Engineer Suresh Babu and Assistant Executive Engineer Kishore inspected the area and removed the motors. But villagers alleged that after a few days, the farmhouse would again fix motors to draw water from the backwaters and they urged to post a watchman in the area. *—Salar News*

Kidnapping, extortion bid thwarted

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

Central Crime Branch (West) foiled a kidnap and murder attempt, arresting five individuals, including a rowdy. On 26 February, a man was abducted in Hoskerehalli, Bengaluru, and his phone and cash were extorted. The abductors then demanded a ransom of Rs 3 lakh. A case was registered at Girinagar Police Station on 27 February, and a team from CCB's Organised Crime Branch rescued the abducted person and arrested all the five involved. The four of the arrested have criminal antecedents. During interrogation, it was revealed that the abductors intended to kill the victim and destroy evidence after collecting the ransom. *—Salar News*

₹71 lakh worth drugs seized in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

Bengaluru police arrested three people and seized drugs valued at around Rs 71 lakh in two operations. On 24 February, officers from SampagiRamnagar Police Station arrested a man suspected of selling opium near Canara Bank near the station. As many as 1,805 grams of opium with an estimated value of Rs 3,50,000 were recovered. On 26 February, Yalahanka Sub Nagar Police Station arrested two foreign nationals selling cocaine and MDMA crystals in Veerasagar village. The police seized 1.25 kg of cocaine and 50 grams of MDMA crystals, with a combined value of Rs 67.5 lakh.*—Salar News*

BJP alleges police failure in cafe blast; CM says probe on

BJP says 'callous' government is downplaying such crimes in the State

MYSURU/ TUMAKURU, 1 MAR

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said investigations are on to ascertain the cause and nature of the explosion at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru on Friday. He added that it might have been caused by an "improvised explosive device". However, BJP targeted Congress for failure of police intelligence in the incident.

Siddaramaiah said those involved will be found and strict action will be taken against them.

"After noon someone placed a bag and went. All the injured people are out of danger," he said

Asked whether it was a terrorist act, he said, it is not known and investigations are on. He has asked the Home Minister also to visit the spot.

"The cashier at the eatery is being questioned, as the person had gone to the cashier to take the token," he added.

"In recent times such blasts had not taken place other than the incident in Mangaluru during BJP rule. This is the first such incident during our government," he added.

He said the incident should not be politicised.

Meanwhile, BJP President BY Vijayendra said the government's "callousness" and the failure of police intelligence is evident in this incident.

He accused the government of downplaying such crimes and said it "is pushing the State into this chaos, making it a haven for antisocial elements."

However, Home Minister G Parameshwara said the Commissioner and Director General of Police have done a spot inspection to ascertain how the blast took place, who did it or whether it could have been an accident.

Speaking to reporters at Kunigal in Tumakuru district, he said, that after gathering the samples, the reason for the blast will be known.

"CCTV videos around the Rameshwaram Cafe for about 2km are being checked and we will provide protection if there are disturbances," said Deputy Chief Minister Shivakumar.

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly and BJP leader R Ashoka claimed that the bomb blast was another example of the "deteriorating law and order situation" in Karnataka ever since Congress government came to power in the state.

"Wherever the Congress comes to power, the terrorists and anti-national elements feel emboldened because of its policy of unabashed and unbridled appeasement," he alleged.

"Congress should first ensure 'guarantee' of safety and security to the people of Karnataka," he said, taking a dig at the government's 'poll guarantees' of welfare schemes. Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya asked Siddaramaiah to give a free hand to the police and investigating agencies to conduct the probe and give clear answers to the people of Bengaluru about the incident. *—Salar News with Agencies*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Home Minister G Parameshwara visit one of the victims of Rameshwaram Cafe blast, in Bengaluru on Friday; Shattered windows of Rameshwaram Cafe after the blast ***PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD/ SALAR***

- Leader of Opposition in the Assembly and BJP leader R Ashoka claimed that the bomb blast was another example of the "deteriorating law and order situation" in Karnataka

2ND DEATH IN 24 HOURS

BJP leader hacked to death in Kalaburagi

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

Girish Babu ***PHOTO: AFP***

Girish Babu Chakra, a well-known BJP leader and a strong supporter of MP Dr. Umesh Jadhav, met a tragic end in Saganur village of Afzalpura taluk in Kalaburagi district on Thursday night.

According to police reports, Girish Babu, who was recently appointed as a member of the district BSNL Advisory Committee by MP Umesh Jadhav, was lured to a farm under the pretext of a celebration organised by his acquaintances. However, upon arrival, Girish was viciously attacked, with assailants allegedly using chilli powder to incapacitate him, resulting in fatal injuries.

"The incident occurred around 11 o'clock, and we have deployed three teams to apprehend the suspects," stated Alland Deputy SP Mohammed Shariff. "Preliminary investigations indicate that three acquaintances of the victim invited him to a party to celebrate his appointment as a district BSNL advisory committee member. The suspects had preplanned the attack, and it appears that longstanding animosity may have been the motive behind the murder. We have solid leads regarding the suspects and anticipate making arrests soon," he added. A case has been registered at Ganagapura police station, and investigations are underway.

Responding swiftly to the scene, Gangapur police have initiated an investigation into the gruesome murder, with intensive efforts underway to apprehend the perpetrators responsible for this brutal act. However, the motive behind the attack remains unclear.

This marks the second murder of BJP leaders in Kalaburagi district within a span of just 24 hours. Earlier on Thursday morning, BJP leader Mahanthappa Siddaramappa Alure, aged 45, fell victim to a fatal attack by unidentified assailants at Sarasamba village in Aland taluk.

Mahanthappa, a prominent figure in the village, served as the president of the Dhanalakshmi Cooperative Society and was elected as a member of the Gram Panchayat for three consecutive terms. *—Salar News*

'Cabinet backing pro-Pak slogans'

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

The entire State Cabinet is backing those who shouted pro-Pakistan slogans in Vidhana Soudha, said Kota Srinivas Poojari, leader of Opposition in Legislative Council.

"It is painful that the slogans were not shouted anywhere else but in Vidhana Soudha. If Kengal Hanumanthaiah was alive, he would be ashamed of this," Poojari said.

Poojari attacked Congress for not making any arrests despite the incident taking place almost six days ago. "Congress MLC BK Hariprasad is making a statement saying, Pakistan is our neighbour, it may be an enemy country to BJP. What does this mean?" Poojari questioned.

Poojari expressed outrage that Syed Naseer Hussain, who has been elected as a member of the Rajya Sabha, has not condemned the incident. "BJP met the Governor on Thursday and he has promised to provide justice," the MLC said.

About the 10th anniversary celebrations of Anna Bhagya scheme held on Thursday, Poojari said the Central government is sending 22 lakh quintals of rice every month to the State. This rice is used for Anna Bhagya scheme. However, Siddaramaiah lied to the people, saying the Congress had implemented the Anna Bhagya programme with the rice provided by the Central government.

Poojari said professor Nitasha Kaul, who was to attend Constitution and National Unity Convention in Bengaluru but was sent back from Kempegowda International Airport, has an agenda against India. Her invitation was opposed by Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Girish Bhardwaj, who had written a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah requesting him to cancel her OCI card. "He has also requested the Central government to instruct all State governments to ban her from all events," Poojari said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday accepted the caste census report submitted by Backward Classes Chairman K Jayaprakash Hegde. Poojari questioned if the report was Hegde's or Kantharaju's (former chairman). *—Salar News*

'Pro-Pak' slogan: Action after getting forensic report: HM

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Friday said the police are waiting for a report from Forensic Science Laboratory to take action in connection with alleged pro-Pakistan slogans raised by supporters of Congress leader Syed Naseer Hussain, who was elected to Rajya Sabha.He said a suspect had been called up and his voice recording had been gathered by the cops.Opposition BJP alleged that Hussain's supporters allegedly raised pro-Pakistan slogans while celebrating his victory in the Rajya Sabha polls on Tuesday. The purported videos of the incident were telecast by TV news channels and also went viral on social media."The FSL report is yet to come. We have asked for the report as soon as possible. The videos given to FSL are not from one channel or one clip. Several clippings have been given to FSL," Parameshwara said.The Home Minister said seven people have been called so far and their statements were recorded. Their voice samples have also been recorded to compare it with that in the clip, he said.Opposition BJP and JD(S) have demanded the Congress government's resignation for its "inaction" in nabbing the culprits who allegedly shouted the 'Pakistan zindabad' slogan, and also accused the administration of trying to cover up the issue.BJP has demanded that Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot recommend the dismissal of the government. *—PTI*

EXAM KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

Students do last minute revision before their second PU examination, in Bengaluru on Friday ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Auto driver held for rape and murder

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

An auto-rickshaw driver was arrested for allegedly raping and murdering a woman in SampangiRamanagar in the City.

The woman's body was found on 20 February under a building on KH Road. An autopsy confirmed she had been raped and she sustained injuries due to a fall. In the early hours of 20 February, the woman hired an auto-rickshaw for a ride from SampangiRamanagar, police said. The auto-rickshaw driver took her to a building and allegedly raped her. He pushed her off the first floor and attempted to destroy evidence.

The authorities have registered cases of rape, murder and attempt to destroy evidence against the driver. *—Salar News*

HC to hear PIL on caste census on 5 March

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

A Public Interest Litigation against Socio-economic and Educational Survey, popularly known as the caste census report, was heard in Karnataka High Court on Friday.

The PIL was filed by Shivaraj Kanashetty questioning the caste census and it was published after nine years of the survey. Senior advocate GR Gurumath argued for the petitioner alleging that the action was taken by the government for political reasons.

A bench comprising Chief Justice NV Anjaria and Justice TG Shivashankar Gowda instructed the government to submit an authorised certificate on whether the government has received the report or not. The High Court adjourned the hearing to 5 March.

The caste census report was submitted to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday by Backward Class Commission Chairman Jaya Prakash Hegde. *—Salar News*

The High Court adjourned the hearing to 5 March ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah felicitates families of organ donors during a programme held at the Chief Minister's residence Kaveri, in Bengaluru ***PHOTO: X***

Organ donors' families get appreciation certificates

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday honoured the families of organ donors by handing over a letter of appreciation.

Recalling the establishment of the Society for Organ Donation in his previous term, the Chief Minister appealed to more people to come forward for organ donation.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said the number of people who have registered for organ donation is more than 8,000. "To create awareness among the people we are holding a programme to appreciate the families of organ donors."

He said each person can donate up to eight organs.

In organ donation, Karnataka ranks second in the country with 178 organ donations in 2023 and 21 in 2024 so far.

In each district, the district in-charge minister or the District Collector will give a letter of appreciation to the family of the organ donor. *—Salar News*

20 yrs on, families affected by naval project await justice

KARWAR, 1 MAR

Kadamba Naval Base project in Karwar ***PHOTO: X***

It has been two decades since they were displaced from their ancestral homes to make way for Kadamba Naval Base project in Karwar. As the second phase of the project nears completion, the affected families continue to grapple with the lingering ordeal of inadequate compensation and unfulfilled promises.

Situated in Araga village of Karwar taluk, the Kadamba Naval Base is hailed as the largest naval base in Asia. While many villages were relocated to accommodate the project's expansion, hundreds of families entrusted with new plots are awaiting rightful compensation.

Despite assurances of job opportunities for land donors at the project's inception, nothing materialised, putting families under financial burdens. Supreme Court had awarded compensation of Rs 11,500 along with accrued interest. While some received their dues, countless families are waiting for equitable compensation.

Deputy Commissioner GangubaiManakar said compensation totalling Rs 1 crore was distributed and efforts were underway to address the concerns of others. *—Salar News*

- It has been two decades since they were displaced from their ancestral homes to make way for Kadamba Naval Base project in Karwar

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Ex-UP governor Aziz Qureshi dies at 83

BHOPAL, 1 MAR

Former Uttar Pradesh Governor and senior Congress leader Aziz Qureshi passed away at a hospital on Friday after a prolonged illness, a family member said. Qureshi was 83, his nephew Sufian Ali, who looked after him, said. "He was not keeping well for some time and breathed his last at a private hospital in Bhopal around 11am," he said. Qureshi had served as the governor of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Mizoram. He was first elected as an MLA in 1972 from Sehore seat in Madhya Pradesh and became a Lok Sabha member in 1984. Qureshi was single. *—PTI*

AAP worker shot dead in Punjab

AMRITSAR, 1 MAR

A worker of the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Punjab's Tarn Taran district on Friday, police said. The incident took place when Gurpreet Singh alias Gopi Chohla was going to Kapurthala district for a court matter in his car. He was traveling alone. When Singh reached the railway crossing between Fatehbad and Goindwal Sahib, the assailants, who had been following him, opened indiscriminate fire on him and fled from the spot, police said. After receiving information about the incident, police personnel led by Deputy Superintendent of Police Ravisher Singh reached the spot. Multiple police teams have been formed to nab the assailants*—PTI*

Case registered against MP MLA for extortion attempt

BHOPAL, 1 MAR

Madhya Pradesh MLA Kamleshwar Dodiyar, who heads Bhartiya Adivasi Party (BAP), faced accusations of attempting to extort Rs one crore from a medical store proprietor, a charge denied by him. Dodiyar, whose organisation represents tribal political factions in certain areas bordering Rajasthan, had stated in his political affidavit during assembly elections that he was contesting with a mere Rs 10,000. Facing a possible arrest once police get clearance from the state Assembly Speaker, the 33-year-old legislator, in a defiant video statement, vowed to counter baseless charges, attributing them to a conspiracy by the ruling BJP government. Ratlam Superintendent of Police Rahul Lodha said charges including extortion, assault for monetary gain, violence, use of offensive language, criminal threats and common intent under the IPC were filed against Dodiyar.Dodiyar, who contested the elections on a fundraising budget of 2.38 lakh, disclosed assets worth Rs 18 lakh and liabilities of Rs 10 lakh in his election affidavit, with a meager Rs 10,000 in hand at the time, marking him as the financially weakest candidate.*—PTI*

Ex-speaker of Sikkim Assembly assaulted

GANGTOK, 1 MAR

Former speaker of Sikkim assembly and senior Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) leader KN Rai and party spokesperson SK Timshina were assaulted by unidentified men in Namchi district on Friday afternoon. Soon after the incident, his party, SDF, strongly condemned the attack and labelled it as a heinous crime, and demanded the immediate arrest of the perpetrators. The party submitted a memorandum to Election Commission, urging it to impose President's Rule in the state to ensure free and fair Lok Sabha and assembly elections, which are expected to be held simultaneously. BJP Sikkim president DR Thapa also condemned the attack on Rai and Timshina.*—PTI*

HP LoP slams Sukhu for inviting disqualified MLAs

BJP claims political turmoil in Himachal will not settle anytime soon

SHIMLA, 1 MAR

Amid mega political turmoil in the state of Himachal Pradesh, Leader of Opposition Jairam Thakur shrugged his shoulders about the current state of affairs and claimed that whatever is happening, is the sole responsibility of the Congress.

Mocking Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu for inviting back the six disqualified Congress MLAs, Thakur said, "There can be no bigger joke than this. Perhaps the Chief Minister is unable to understand clearly that what is being said. There is such a situation now that he is fearful that the government is going to go away; MLAs are leaving his side. The political situation in Himachal Pradesh is such that whatever the Congress high command may say, things have not settled yet and there is no possibility of that happening."

When asked if they will bring a No Confidence Motion against the state government, Thakur dismissed the idea, emphasizing that the internal strife and political developments were solely the responsibility of the ruling party.

Asserting the Opposition's stance, Thakur clarified that they are merely observers of the unfolding events and not instigating any action.

Thakur's confidence is borne out by the deep divisions in the Congress. State Congress President Pratibha Singh has not given any assurance that the party will complete its term under Sukhu.

When asked about Congress Observers' statement that Sukhu will continue for 5 years, Singh said that, "Observer ke bolne se kya hota hai? Observers want this to happen. It is difficult to say what people want and what will happen."

Notably, after the 2022 Assembly elections, Congress had 40 MLAs, while the BJP had 25 in the 68-member state assembly. The remaining three seats are held by independents. With the six rebel MLAs disqualified, the strength of the House has come down from 68 to 62, and the halfway mark is now 32.

With the loss of six MLAs, the Congress now has 34 MLAs and the BJP, with independents, has 28. The fortunes of the Congress will now rest on its ability to keep the rest of its flock together.

The political crisis in the state was triggered by the Congress losing the Rajya Sabha election on Tuesday despite having a clear majority in the assembly. *—ANI*

With the loss of six MLAs, the Congress now has 34 MLAs and the BJP, with independents, has 28 *PHOTO: PTI*

- Notably, after the 2022 Assembly elections, the Congress had 40 MLAs, while the BJP had 25 in the 68-member state assembly. The remaining three seats are held by independents

PM IN BENGAL

TMC questions 'non-release' of MGNREGA dues

KOLKATA, 1 MAR

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Friday raised questions about "non-release" of MGNREGA dues to the state, allegedly withheld by the Centre.

TMC also launched a social media campaign with a hashtag-AayeHoTohBataKeJao (When you have come, please reply)- in an apparent reference to the alleged withholding of funds under various schemes by the Centre and other issues.

Modi will be on a two-day tour in the state from Friday during which he will address two public rallies in Hooghly and Nadia districts and inaugurate several projects, state BJP president Sukanta Majumdar said.Modi will address two public meetings, the first at Arambag in Hooghly district on Friday, followed by another at Krishnanagar in Nadia on Saturday, he said.

TMC leader Santanu Sen said, "Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the Prime Minister is again commencing his tour of Bengal. The BJP had won 18 seats from the state in 2019 but the BJP-led central government has withheld the funds of the state in various schemes, including the MGNREGA dues.

He also said, "It is the Mamata Banerjee government which is now clearing the dues to workers."

West Bengal government had on Monday commenced the payment of dues to approximately 30 lakh MGNREGA workers, amounting to Rs 2,700 crore, which was pending since March 2022. Modi will head to Krishnanagar to launch development projects worth Rs 15,000 crore, it added. *—ANI*

Narendra Modi *PHOTO: PTI*

SANDESHKHALI ROW

Mamata shielded Shahjahan for votes: Union minister

BEGUSARAI, 1 MAR

After the suspension of Trinamool Congress leader Shahjahan Shiekh for six years by the TMC, Union Minister Giriraj Singh launched a scathing attack on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, saying that she has set a standard for appeasement.

He said that Mamata Banerjee is saving Shahjahan and allowing such people to play with the dignity of Hindu women.

"Mamata Banerjee saved Shahjahan in such a manner that no sections of women harassment have been registered against him. You have set a standard of appeasement. You took a long time to arrest him. For votes and appeasement, ," said Union Minister Giriraj Singh.Earlier also, Singh lashed at Mamata Banerjee and said that he had never seen such a 'ruthless' Chief Minister and alleged that accused Shahjahan was safeguarded by the state government.Close to two months after Sheikh Shahjahan was reported untraceable in the wake of the attack on an ED team, which was on its way to raid his residence in the North 24 Parganas in connection with the alleged ration scam, the TMC strongman, who is also alleged by the women of Sandeshkhali to have perpetrated grave atrocities along with his henchmen, was arrested by West Bengal police on Thursday morning. His close aide, Aamir Ali Gazi, was also arrested from Jharkhand. West Bengal's Basirhat Court remanded Trinamool Congress (TMC) Sheikh Shahjahan to 10-day police custody on Thursday and on the same day, Trinamool Congress suspended him from the party for six years.

TMC leader Derek O'Brien held a press conference here today and said that by the time West Bengal Police was given freedom, it took two days to arrest the culprit.*—ANI*

Giriraj Singh, Mamata Banerjee *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA/PTI*

Stop parties from campaigning in my village: Jarange

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 1 MAR

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Friday protested the ongoing curfew at his village Antarwali Sarati in Maharashtra's Latur district, calling it an injustice. No violence has been reported from the village or the surrounding area, he told reporters at a hospital here where he was under treatment after ending his hunger strike over the demand for reservation for the Marathas last month.

"If the curfew continued (at Antarwali Sarati) after the code of conduct for Lok Sabha polls comes into effect, it should apply to the election campaign of political parties. They too should not be allowed to hold meetings. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah should see that their home minister in the state is doing injustice," Jarange said, referring to Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. *—PTI*

Waqf case: Court denies bail plea to AAP MLA

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

A court here on Friday dismissed the application of AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan seeking anticipatory bail in a money laundering case related to alleged irregularities by the Delhi Waqf Board in hiring staff and leasing out assets during his chairmanship.

Special Judge Rakesh Syal denied the relief to Khan, saying there was no reasonable ground for believing that he is not guilty of the offence of money laundering.

Khan, the Okhla MLA, was not named as an accused in the charge sheet that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed recently.

The agency has named five people in its prosecution complaint (the ED's equivalent of a charge sheet) that included three alleged associates of Khan -- Zeeshan Haider, Daud Nasir and Jawed Imam Siddiqui.

The ED, after conducting raids on premises linked to Khan and some others in October, had claimed that the AAP MLA acquired "huge proceeds of crime" in cash from illegal recruitment of staff to the Delhi Waqf Board and invested those for purchasing immovable assets in the name of his associates.

The searches were conducted in the case related to illegal recruitment of staff and illegitimate personal gains made by the accused by way of unfairly leasing Waqf Board properties during 2018-2022 when Khan was its chairperson, the ED said.

The money laundering case stems from a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) FIR and three Delhi Police complaints. *—PTI*

Amanatullah Khan *PHOTO: X/ AMANATULLAH KHAN*

Parl breach accused alleges denial of aid

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Parliament Security Breach case accused Neelam Azad on Friday told the court that she is suffering from back pain but she is not being provided medicine in the jail. All six accused were produced physically before the court on Friday. All the six accused persons of the Parliament Security Breach case have changed their counsel. Now all accused will be represented by one private counsel, advocate Somarjuna. After hearing, Additional Sessions Judge (ASJ) Dr Hardeep Kaur listed the matter for further hearing on 11 March. Judicial custody of all accused has also been extended till the next date. The court has also asked Delhi Police to file its response over the allegations made in the application. Previously, Azad, informed the court that a female officer had compelled her to sign 52 blank papers forcefully the day before. *—PTI*

SC junks ex-TN CM's plea against HC notice in DA case

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Supreme Court on Friday dismissed a plea by former Tamil Nadu chief minister O Panneerselvam challenging a Madras High Court order issuing notice to him and his relatives in a case it has initiated on its own over their discharge in a disproportionate assets case.

"We may, however, observe that the observation made by the judge in the impugned order are to be considered only for the purpose of the notice order and those observations should have no bearing in deciding the criminal revision finally," the High court said.

The High Court had on 31 August last year issued notice to Paneerselvam and some of his relatives on a criminal revision case it has initiated on its own.

The court directed Paneerselvam, his wife Vijayalakshmi (since deceased), his son Ravindranathkumar, his brothers O Raja and O Balamurugan and their wives to remain present before it for hearing.

The trial court had discharged them in the DA case in 2012.

The DVAC had alleged that Paneerselvam amassed assets in his name and those of his relatives that was 374 times disproportionate to his known sources of income during his tenure as the chief minister for four months and subsequently as revenue minister from 2001 to 2006.

Narrating the sequence of events and pointing out the flaws in the procedure followed by the prosecution and the trial court, the high court judge had said it once again revealed a calculated attempt by those wielding political power to distort and subvert the course of criminal justice. *—PTI*

O Panneerselvam *PHOTO: FB*

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EC warns of action against violation of model code of conduct

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Ahead of Lok Sabha polls, Election Commission on Friday asked parties and their leaders to refrain from seeking votes based on caste, religion, and language, and not insult the devotee-deity relation or make any suggestion of a divine censure.

In an advisory warning the parties, candidates, of stern action for any violation of the Model Code of Conduct instead of the previous practice of only 'moral censure', the poll panel also said that any other place of worship should not be used for poll propaganda. EC warned the parties to maintain decorum in public campaigning and put additional responsibility on star campaigners and candidates.

It asked the parties to raise the level of the election campaign to issue-based debate and said the parties and their leaders should not mislead the voters. *—PTI*

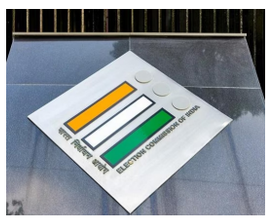


PHOTO: PTI

SC rejects plea to monitor MPs, MLAs

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Supreme Court on Friday rejected the petition seeking electronic tracking of the MPs in the country, with a warning to the petitioner not to move such a petition again.

A bench led by Chief Justice of India, DY Chandrachud, was shocked to see the prayer of public interest litigation and expressed its inability to entertain the PIL. CJI also warned Kundra that the court would be imposing costs for such a petition but later he dismissed the petition without slapping any costs.

The court also said that all laws are passed by parliament after elected MPs participate and as individual citizens, the public cannot arrogate the law. The court also commented that one day people will say that they don't need judges and start deciding punishment for theft on the streets only. *—ANI*

'CHINESE FLAG' AD CONTROVERSY

BJP mocks Stalin with 'Mandarin' birthday wish

CHENNAI, 1 MAR

Tamil Nadu BJP took a jibe at Chief Minister and DMK leader MK Stalin on Friday by extending birthday wishes in Mandarin amid the ongoing 'Chinese flag' newspaper advertisement controversy.

In a post that said 'happy birthday in his (CM Stalin's) 'favourite' language, the BJP posted a picture message with wishes written in Mandarin along with the Chief Minister's photo.

"On behalf of BJP Tamil Nadu, here's wishing our CM MK Stalin avargal a happy birthday in his favourite language! May he live a long & healthy life!" the post on X said.

Controversy erupted on Thursday after a newspaper advertisement of the DMK government allegedly showcased a 'China flag' among rockets from other countries in the background.

The advertisement promoted the laying of the foundation stone for ISRO's second launch pad complex in Kulsekarapatinam.

This invited criticism from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was on his two-day visit to the state earlier this week. He called out the ruling party in the state while he was addressing a gathering in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli.

"DMK is a party that does not work but stands ahead to take false credit. These people paste their stickers on our schemes. Now that they have crossed the limits, they have pasted China's sticker to take credit for the ISRO launch pad in Tamil Nadu," PM Modi said.

Modi alleged that the DMK is 'not ready' to accept India's progress in the space sector.

However, DMK MP K Kanimozhi defended the advertisement, saying, "I don't think India has declared China an enemy country."

"I don't know from where the person who did the artwork found this picture," Kanimozhi said. *—ANI*

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin cuts a cake during his birthday celebrations, in Chennai on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

- The advertisement promoted the laying of the foundation stone for ISRO's second launch pad complex in Kulsekarapatinam. This invited criticism from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was on his two-day visit to the state earlier this week

Scribe held 2 days after released from prison

SRINAGAR, 1 MAR

Two days after Kashmiri journalist Asif Sultan was released from a five-year detention, he has been rearrested here in another case, officials said on Friday. "Sultan was rearrested late Thursday night," the officials said. He was first arrested in an Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act case in September 2018 when he was working as a reporter with a local magazine. The journalist was arrested for "allegedly providing logistical support to a banned militant group." In April 2022, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court granted him bail in the case on the grounds that investigative agencies "failed to establish his links with any militant group". *—PTI*

Remuneration hike for temporary teachers in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 1 MAR

Odisha government Friday announced a hike in the remuneration of temporary teachers and regularisation of the services of those who passed the Odisha Teacher Eligibility Test (OTET). Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik announced in this regard, a statement issued by the Chief Ministers Office (CMO) said. The temporary teachers, known as 'GanaSikshyaks', who have not passed the OTET, will get enhanced remuneration, it said. From now on, they will get a remuneration of Rs 10,000 per month, which is currently Rs 7,000 a month. This move will benefit 1,121 GanaSikshyaks, the statement said. Patnaik also announced that the services of GanaSikshyaks, who have passed the (OTET), will be regularised, and they will become assistant teachers, it said, adding that a total of 1,472 such teachers will benefit as a result. *—PTI*

Intel head death: Driver lost control over vehicle

THANE, 1 MAR

The driver of the cab that fatally knocked down former Intel India country head Avtar Saini in Maharashtra's NaviMumbai, has told the police that he lost control of the vehicle as he dozed off because he was driving all night.The police have registered a case against the driver, RishikeshKhade, 23 following the incident that occurred around 5.50am on Wednesday on the Palm Beach Road in Navi Mumbai's Nerul area.The speeding cab hit Saini while he was cycling. The cab hit Saini's bicycle from behind and Khade then tried to escape from the spot with the bicycle's frame wedged under the front wheels of the cab. Saini's companions rushed him to a hospital where he was declared dead on arrival, the police said. *—PTI*

Channels fined for spreading hatred

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) has penalised some television channels and ordered the removal of certain programmes from their websites, saying that they spread hatred and communal disharmony and are "not in good taste".The self-regulatory body has also slapped a fine of Rs 1 lakh on TimesNowNavbharat and Rs 50,000 on News18 India based on complaints filed by activist IndrajeetGhorpade for their news shows on "love jihad".'Love jihad' is a term used by right-wing activists to allege a conspiracy by Muslim men to get Hindu women to convert by luring them into marriage.NBDSA has warned AajTak for its coverage of violence on Ram Navami targeting a particular community.The orders issued by NBDSA Chairman Justice (retd) A K Sikri asked the three channels to take down the online versions of the programmes within seven days.*—PTI*

12.5M children, teens in India obese in 2022: Lancet study

Obesity & being underweight are detrimental to people's health

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

About 12.5 million children aged between five and 19 in India were overweight in 2022, according to a global analysis published in The Lancet journal

Of the 12.5, 7.3 million were boys and 5.2 million girls.

The total number of children, adolescents and adults worldwide living with obesity has surpassed one billion. These trends, together with the declining prevalence of people who are underweight since 1990, make obesity the most common form of malnutrition in most countries, the researchers said.

Obesity and underweight are both forms of malnutrition and are detrimental to people's health in many ways. The latest study provides a highly detailed picture of global trends in both forms of malnutrition over the last 33 years.

The total number of children, adolescents and adults worldwide living with obesity has surpassed one billion ***PHOTO: X***

The analysis by the NCD Risk Factor Collaboration (NCD-RisC) -- a global network of scientists -- and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that among the world's children and adolescents, the rate of obesity in 2022 was four times the rate in 1990.

"It is very concerning that the epidemic of obesity that was evident among adults in much of the world in 1990 is now mirrored in school-aged children and adolescents," said senior author Professor Majid Ezzati, from Imperial College London in the UK.

Among adults, the global obesity rate more than doubled in women and nearly tripled in men. In total, 159 million children and adolescents and 879 million adults were living with obesity in 2022, according to the study.

- In India, adult obesity rate increased from 1.2 per cent in 1990 to 9.8 per cent in 2022 for women and 0.5 per cent to 5.4 per cent for men. Nearly 44 million women and 26 million men had obesity in 2022

In India, adult obesity rate increased from 1.2 per cent in 1990 to 9.8 per cent in 2022 for women and 0.5 per cent to 5.4 per cent for men. Nearly 44 million women and 26 million men had obesity in 2022.

Among girls, a decrease in the rates of underweight was detected in 44 countries, whilst among boys, a decrease was noted in 80 countries, they said.

The total number of children and adolescents who were affected by obesity in 2022 was nearly 160 million (65 million girls and 94 million boys), compared to 31 million in 1990. Whereas 77 million girls and 108 million boys were underweight in 2022, decreasing from 81 million for girls and 138 million for boys in 1990.

In adults, obesity rates more than doubled among women and nearly tripled in men between 1990 and 2022.

In all age groups, the combined burden of both forms of malnutrition increased in most countries between 1990 and 2022, driven by increasing obesity rates.

—PTI

MLAs slam resolution on pact signed with Kuki 'militants'

CHURANCHANDPUR, 1 MAR

Ten tribal MLAs of Manipur have condemned the "biased" resolution passed by the state assembly urging Centre to abrogate Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with all Kuki-Zo underground groups.

So pact was signed by the Centre, Manipur government, and two conglomerates of Kuki militant outfits – Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF). The pact was signed in 2008 and extended periodically thereafter.

In a statement, the 10 legislators belonging to the Kuki Zomi Hmar communities MLAs said, "It is a one-sided resolution emanating from prejudice, bias, and hatred for our community that reflects a myopic view on the issue."

Of the MLAs, seven belong to the ruling BJP, two are from Kuki People's Alliance (KPA) and one is an Independent. They were not present in the assembly when the resolution was passed.

The statement said that as part of SoO pact, a Joint Monitoring Group (JMG) comprising representatives of central and state government agencies, KNO and UPF was formed to oversee adherence to the ground Rules.

The agreement was lauded as the harbinger of peace in the state when it was signed in 2008 and Manipur, particularly the hill districts, has witnessed a sea change in the security scenario as the level of violence came down drastically in the years that followed, it said.

Ten tribal MLAs of Manipur have condemned the "biased" resolution passed by the state Assembly ***PHOTO: X***

UNLF (P) on 29, November 2023 became the first Meitei armed group in Imphal Valley to enter into a ceasefire agreement with the government and agreed to renounce violence.

—PTI

MANIPUR: 3 MEMBERS OF BANNED KCP(N) HELD

IMPHAL, 1 MAR

Manipur Police arrested three members of the banned proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (Nongdren khomba) KCP (N) from Imphal West district and recovered arms and ammunition from their possession, on Friday. Five mobile handsets and Rs 4 lakh in cash were also seized from their possession, it said. The arms and ammunition recovered from them are suspected to have been looted from security forces earlier, a police officer said. The arrested members of the proscribed KCP (N) were identified as L Alin, Herish Maibam, and Bela Oinam, Manipur has remained gripped by recurring bouts of violence since ethnic clashes between two communities first erupted in May last year. Altogether 219 people have been killed since then. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts. *—PTI*

India must build nat'l strengths to lead: EAM

PUNE, 1 MAR

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said that in the next 25 years, India must build "deep national strengths" that will drive its transition towards a developed economy and leading power.

Flagging the dangers of dependence on a limited number of suppliers, challenges of technology, and "weaponisation of market dominance", he asserted that the country's goals and ambitions cannot be determined by "the goodwill of others".

The minister's recorded video message was played on Thursday during the inaugural event of the 5th Asia Economic Dialogue, a three-day annual geo-economics conference organised jointly by Ministry of External Affairs and Pune International Centre.

The theme of the conference this year is 'Geo-economic challenges in the era of flux'.Jaishankar said the present geo-economic challenges fall into three categories -- supply chain challenges, technology challenges, and the challenge of "over-concentration stemming from the nature of globalisation".

Only greater international cooperation can mitigate unilateral demands and "economic domination of technology assertions", Jaishankar said. *—PTI*

UP class 12 exam papers leaked on Whatsapp

AGRA, 1 MAR

The mathematics and biology question papers of the Uttar Pradesh class 12 board exam were allegedly shared on a WhatsApp group here an hour after the examinations began on Thursday, prompting authorities to lodge a police complaint.

On the complaint of District Inspector of Schools (DIOS), Agra, Dinesh Kumar, an FIR has been registered in FatehpurSikri.

The principal of Atar Singh Inter College, Rajhauli, in Kiraoli in FathepurSikri, his son, who works as a computer operator at the institute, and others are named in the complaint, the FIR stated.

It is alleged that the question papers were posted on the WhatsApp group "All Principals Agra" by the principal's son, it stated.

Joint Director of the Secondary Education Department and Observer for the exams, Dr Mukesh Agrawal, said, "We have formed a committee after the incident, and accordingly directed the officials concerned to take necessary steps in this regard. Legal action will be taken against those who have done this act."

The question papers were shared an hour after the exam began in the second shift, officials said.

—PTI

SC to hear Gyanvapi panel's plea

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear an appeal of the Gyanvapi management committee against an Allahabad High Court order which held that lawsuits for "restoration" of a temple where the mosque stands in Varanasi are maintainable.

On 19 December last year, the Allahabad High Court had dismissed pleas challenging the maintainability of a 1991 suit seeking the "restoration" of a temple at the site where the Gyanvapi mosque stands. High Court had said that the "religious character" of a disputed place can only be decided by the court. It had dismissed five related petitions -- on maintainability and also against a survey of the mosque premises -- filed over the years by the mosque committee and the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board.

—PTI

AFTER 2 NIGHTS OUTSIDE

Will not move from this site: Uttarakhand tunnel rescue hero

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

"We will not move from this site," says Wakeel Hassan, a rat-hole miner who was part of the Silkyara tunnel rescue operation, sitting on a footpath where he and his family spent their second night after losing their house in a demolition drive.

"My family and I continue to spend the night in the open. Some locals are providing us with food and water, etc.," Hassan said on Friday, a day after he refused an offer by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to move him and his family to an EWS flat in Narela.

"We have now accepted the night as a challenge," he said, adding the family has not received any help from the government so far. Hassan was part of a team of miners who rescued 41 workers trapped inside Uttarkashi's Silkyara tunnel by manually drilling through the debris in November last year. His house in north-east Delhi's KhajooriKhas was razed in a demolition drive by the DDA on Wednesday.

Hassan was part of a team of miners who rescued 41 workers trapped inside Uttarkashi's Silkyara tunnel by manually drilling ***PHOTO: PTI***

- He said on Thursday that DDA officials had told him that he would be provided a house but he refused the offer as it was only a "verbal assurance."The DDA said said that "in its role as an authority, it cannot allow encroachment on its land or unauthorised constructions in its development areas".

He said on Thursday that DDA officials had told him that he would be provided a house but he refused the offer as it was only a "verbal assurance".

Later in the day, he demanded that his house be reconstructed on the same land and threatened to go on a hunger strike if his demand is not met.

While Hassan claims his house was demolished without prior information, the DDA has said he was aware of his house's "status of encroachment" as it had been previously removed in 2016 and the land was encroached upon again in 2017.

The DDA said said that "in its role as an authority, it cannot allow encroachment on its land or unauthorised constructions in its development areas".

—PTI

ELECTION PANEL ROW

ABVP & Left backed groups clash at JNU

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Some students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) were injured in a clash between two groups over the selection of election committee members, following which Vice-Chancellor Santishree D Pandit on Friday said strict action will be taken against those involved irrespective of their political affiliation.

The violence occurred in the University's School of Languages building late on Thursday night. Students from both AkhilBharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and Left-backed groups have filed police complaints against each other.

The complaints were registered at Vasant Kunj North police station. A university official said some students have been admitted to Safdarjung Hospital.

"We received information about the clashes on the campus at 1.15 am. At least four students were injured. Multiple complaints have been received from both sides. Further inquiry is on," a police officer said.

University Vice-Chancellor Santishree D Pandit said the administration will look into the matter and take strict action.

A video clip of the incident showed a man thrashing students with a stick while in another, a person is seen throwing a bicycle at students. Other videos also purportedly showed individuals being mobbed and beaten up by a group while security personnel of the university tried to rescue them.

The ABVP told PTI that two students seen in one of the videos beating others with a stick and throwing a bicycle were members of its JNU unit and claimed that they were trying to defend themselves.

On the other hand, Left-backed groups alleged that ABVP members, disgruntled by the selection of the election committee members, attacked JNUSU office bearers and other students.

JNUSU Joint Secretary Mohammad Danish, who was presiding the School General Body Meeting along with JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh, claimed that he received threats to his life from ABVP members because of his religious identity.

He also alleged that he was held hostage during the meeting.

—PTI

The violence occurred in the University's School of Languages building late on Thursday night ***PHOTO: X***

Bihar govt withholds salaries of VCs

PATNA, 1 MAR

In an unprecedented move, the Bihar government has ordered freezing of the bank accounts of all the state-run universities, barring one, and withheld salaries of their vice-chancellors for allegedly being absent in a review meeting convened by the education department two days ago.

The department's letter, issued to all VCs barring Kameshwar Singh Darbhanga Sanskrit University, has sought clarification from the VCs concerned as to why they did not attend the meeting.The government, had in August last year, stopped their salaries for their alleged failure to inspect the educational institutions under their jurisdiction

—PTI

Mahadev app: ED freezes ₹580cr assets

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Enforcement Directorate has frozen security holdings of more than Rs 580 crore of a Dubai-based "hawala operator" and seized cash and valuables worth Rs 3.64 crore after fresh raids in the Mahadev app-linked money laundering case, on Friday.

The latest raids were launched on 28 February at various premises in Kolkata, Gurugram, Delhi, Indore, Mumbai and Raipur.

ED probe into Mahadev online gaming and betting app has indicated purported involvement of various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh.

The sources said the agency identified a "hawala operator", Hari Shankar Tibrewal in this case. He hails from Kolkata but currently resides in Dubai. He partnered with the promoters of the Mahadev app and also owned and operated an alleged illegal betting app, skyexchange.

Security holdings worth Rs 580.78 crore "beneficially owned" by Tibrewal have been frozen by the ED under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said.

Cash worth Rs 1.86 crore and valuables worth Rs 1.78 crore were recovered by the agency during these searches, according to the sources.

So far, ED has arrested nine people in this case.

The agency had earlier said that the alleged illegal funds generated by the Mahadev app were used to pay bribes to politicians and bureaucrats in Chhattisgarh, from where the main promoters and operatives of the app hail.

—PTI

SC refuses to entertain godman Asaram's plea

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea of self-styled godman Asaram, serving life term in a rape case, for suspension of the sentence because of his deteriorating health condition.

A bench of Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice DipankarDatta asked senior advocate MukulRohatgi, to approach the Rajasthan High Court for relief after he said Asaram was willing to accept the public prosecutor's statement that he could avail treatment at Madhavbaug Heart Hospital in Maharashtra's Khopoli in police custody.

The bench asked Asaram to submit an application before the Rajasthan High Court for his treatment at Madhavbaug Heart Hospital and it would be considered in accordance with the law. *—PTI*

UNION CALLS FOR STRIKE

Public transport workers demonstrate through Erfurt city center, Germany on Thursday. The Verdi trade union had called on employees in the local public transport sector to go on a further 48-hour warning strike in the ongoing nationwide wage dispute in regional negotiations
PHOTO: PTI

90% of Himalayas to face year-long drought

CLIMATE CHANGE

According to study, 80% of the increased human exposure to heat stress can be avoided by adhering to Paris Agreement's temperature goals of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

About 90 per cent of the Himalayan Region will experience drought lasting over a year if global warming increases by 3 degrees Celsius, according to new research.

The findings, published in the journal Climatic Change, show that 80 per cent of the increased human exposure to heat stress in India can be avoided by adhering to Paris Agreement's temperature goals of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to 3 degrees Celsius warming.

The team led by researchers at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in the UK quantified how climate change risks to human and natural systems increase at a national scale as the level of global warming increases.

A collection of eight studies -- all focusing on India, Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Ghana -- shows that the risks of drought, flooding, declines in crop yields, and loss of biodiversity and natural capital greatly increase for each additional degree of global warming.

It found that in India pollination is reduced by half at 3-4 degrees global warming compared to a quarter reduction at 1.5 degrees.

Limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius allows half the country to act as a refuge for biodiversity, compared with 6 per cent at 3 degrees, the researchers said.

The team found very large increases in the exposure of agricultural land to drought with 3 degrees Celsius warming more than 50 per cent of the agricultural land in each of the countries studied is projected to be exposed to severe droughts of longer than one year over a 30-year period.

However, limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius would reduce the increase in exposure of agricultural land to drought by between 21 per cent (India) and 61 per cent (Ethiopia) as well as reduce economic damages due to fluvial flooding.

This happens when rivers and streams break their banks and the water flows out onto the adjacent low-lying areas.

Avoided increases in human exposure to severe drought are also 20-80 per cent lower at 1.5 degrees Celsius than 3 degrees Celsius across the six countries, the researchers said.

Economic damages associated with sea-level rise are projected to increase in coastal nations, but more slowly if warming was limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius, they said.

The researchers warned that more effort is needed to reduce global warming, as currently the policies in place globally are likely to result in 3 degrees Celsius of global warming.

One paper explored the risks to plants and vertebrates due to increases in global warming, and another developed a new natural capital risk register for each of the six countries that also included the projected changes in the risk stemming from future human population changes.

This combination shows that many areas in the six countries are already at high natural capital risk at 1.5 degrees Celsius when effects of increasing human population are accounted for. "The results presented in this collection confirm the need for the implementation of climate policies aligned to the Paris Agreement limits if widespread and escalating climate change risk is to be avoided," said lead author of the paper, Professor Rachel Warren, from the UEA.

Although these studies focus on the risks to six countries only, other nations are projected to experience similar issues, the researchers said.

Greater emphasis needs to be placed on both climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation. "For example, a good way to combat the effects of climate change on natural systems and soak up carbon from the atmosphere is to restore ecosystems to their natural state, especially if warming can be held to 2 degrees Celsius or less. This has the additional benefit of restoring the natural capital bank in these areas," said study co-author Jeff Price, also from the UEA.The work focuses on developing countries as they tend to be more vulnerable to climate change than others.

Spanning the continents of Asia, Africa, and South America, the case studies present examples of both large and small countries and cover a range of levels of socioeconomic development.

The risks assessed are the additional risks due to anthropogenic or human-induced climate change corresponding to the elevated global warming in comparison with a baseline of levels of risk in 1961-1990, when warming was approximately 0.3 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

The studies provide a harmonised assessment for the six countries of projected changes in exposure of humans and land to climate-related hazards, such as drought, water stress, fluvial and coastal flooding, and the projected effects of climate change on biodiversity, as well as the economic and societal implications of climate risks.

—PTI

SALAR ساڵار

Johannesburg woes: City battles water shortage

Since the latter part of 2023 hardly a week has gone by without some residents of Johannesburg, South Africa's commercial capital, losing their water supply. Notices of planned outages from the local water authority are a common occurrence. Unplanned water shutdowns also happen regularly.

Why don't Johannesburg citizens have enough water?

The water allocation for each province is based on the amount available in the dams (which must also supply our future needs) and the number of people in that province. Currently the Vaal Dam is 70 per cent full.

Rand Water – the area's bulk water supplier – buys the water from the Department of Water and Sanitation, which will only sell a certain amount to it. Rand Water takes water mainly from the Vaal Dam – the region's biggest – and treats it to potable quality. It then sells the water to Johannesburg and Pretoria (and other cities and towns) which are in Gauteng, the smallest of South Africa's nine provinces and its industrial heartland.The cities sell the water to their residents through their distribution systems.

Rand Water is not allowed to supply more than the amount set by the Department of Water and Sanitation. But there is a mismatch between what's allocated by the national government and what's needed on the ground.

Why no new dam to supply more water?

But the next phase (Phase 2) of the Lesotho Highlands Scheme is eight years behind schedule. The Lesotho Highlands Water Project is a multinational project to provide water to the Gauteng region of South Africa and to generate hydro-electricity for Lesotho. Work on the dam design started in 2017 and tender design was completed during 2020. Construction is expected to be completed with commissioning expected in 2028.

This eight-year delay roughly coincided with a period during which the population of Gauteng grew from 12 million to 15.1 million people. In 2023 the province had the same amount of water storage because the dam was not built.

There is now substantially less water for everyone in the province, including residents of Johannesburg.

The City of Johannesburg is running its finances poorly. The maintenance bill for water infrastructure is US$105 million per year, but only US$52 million is allocated. Maintenance needs are spiralling out of control. The city bills residents for rates, water, electricity, sewage and other services. However, the funds received are not ringfenced. Other projects are competing for the same pot of money.

Because the infrastructure is ageing the pipes rust and break. When they break, they leak, sometimes releasing very large quantities of water, before they are repaired. When the city responds to requests by residents for repairs, the response, if it comes, is often too little and the job is poorly done. There is little oversight or accountability by the city to ensure the contractors have done the job correctly and the repairs often do not last long.Also, 15 million people are relying on a system designed for far fewer people. When everyone starts to use water, there just isn't enough to go around.

There is also an additional factor in this discussion: non-revenue water. This is the term used for water that's unbilled by the city – in other words, free water, unauthorised consumption or water lost due to leakages. This is water that is supplied by Rand Water, but is essentially "financially lost".In South Africa, the government gives a free basic allowance of 6,000 litres per month to every household.

Of the non-revenue water, the leakage portion for Gauteng is half. In other words, for every four litres provided to Gauteng by Rand Water, one litre is wasted through leakage (the city's fault) and one litre is either given away for free (public good), stolen (the public's fault), or not accounted for (much harder to allocate blame). This means only half of what is provided can be charged for.

The average consumption in Gauteng is 279 litres per person per day. This ismore than 60 per cent greater than the global average, the highest of any province, 27 per cent more than the country average.Gauteng citizens use too much, the cities waste way too much and there is too much theft of drinking water. The social pact is breaking down as a consequence. This is indicated by the number of civic action groups forming, for example WaterCAN.

To restore this pact, the city needs to focus on non-revenue water, by allocating the correct and appropriate maintenance spend to fix and even renew the water network. At the same time citizens need to seriously consider their own water usage and how to reduce it.

The citizens of Cape Town were forced to face the possibility of the taps running dry permanently in 2018 during a five-year drought.

Water consumption was drastically limited, forcing people to become very water conscious.

This has to become the new normal if there is to be uninterrupted water supply.

Courtesy, The Conversation

In Johannesburg notices of planned outages from the local water authority are a common occurrence
PHOTO: PIXABAY

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

Leap day babies don birthday hats after four-year wait

The leap year baby club is largely a lonely one as people born on this special day rarely find fellow leapers ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Birthdays are special, and what when they come only once in four years? Well, the day then just takes on that extra sparkle. As it has this Thursday, when 'leaplings', the special few born on 29 February the world over are celebrating – and being celebrated -- just that little bit more.

Every four years, the world receives an extra day from the calendar gods. The rarest of the days to be born on has given India its former prime minister Morarji Desai and Bharatanatyam dancer Rukmini Devi. Adding that edge of cool is a bit of fiction too – Superman, the Man of Steel, was born on this day, according to DC comics.

Jigyasa Pant is no Superman, or Superwoman either, but she has been waiting four years for this day and feels as special as the superheroes. Celebrations, she said, start early for the 'leap day baby'.

Pant, a placement executive at Indraprastha Engineering College in Ghaziabad, usually celebrates her birthday on 28 February and/or 1 March. But if it's a leap year, it begins right from 1 January.

"Each day is kind of a celebration in a leap year. People start texting me from January 1 that this is my birthday year. It is extra special to keep receiving wishes and blessings for two whole months," Pant said.The 32-year-old will be turning eight this year, a few more years before she enters her teenage years at the age of 52!

Supreme Court lawyer Prachiti Behere was born the same day – and year. Behere said she uses her birthdays to break ice and reach out to new people.

"It used to be a great way of making friends as everyone would get excited about it," the 32-year-old said on the eve of her eighth birthday. No one forgets your birthday and everyone makes it a point to wish you.Even though she gets to celebrate her birthday twice, on 28 February and 1 March, in an ordinary year, it's the grand celebration and enthusiastic family members that make Behere's actual birthday all the more memorable.

"My husband showers me with double the number of gifts I usually get. Everyone is so excited about it. Generally people forget birthdays, but it is not possible to forget 29 February," she added.

What exactly is a leap year?

According to US space agency NASA, it takes about 365.25 days for Earth to orbit the Sun — a solar year. The extra quarter of a day is generally rounded off in a calendar year.

To make up for the missing partial day, one day is added to the calendar approximately every four years. That is a leap year. Without the existence of a leap year, the world could end up witnessing wuthering winters in July or sultry summers in December.

Birthday boy Probir Dasgupta, a Delhi-based media consult, doesn't believe in celebrating birthdays but enjoys whatever the family organises on March 1 when it is not a leap year. But then today, his 'once-in-four year' birthday, is different.

"On my actual birthday, I feel special. It makes me feel younger," said Dasgupta, who turns 72 this year or a young adult of 18 in leap years.

"Actual birthdays are different, it feels more real. I feel wiser not older."

Some other famous people crowned 'leaplings' include Spanish prime minister Pedro Sanchez, Arjuna awardee Indian shooter Prakash Nanjappa, American actor Alex Rocco of "The Godfather" fame, and Jessie Usher, who is known for his role in OTT series "The Boys".Delhi-based media professional Shiv Kumar Yadav waits expectantly for 29 February as he plans a visit to a temple and then spends most of the day with his friends.

"Generally I celebrate my birthday on both 28 February and 1 March, but the celebration and excitement is multifold when it is 29 February. It feels special on that day," the 28-year-old said.

A native of Ayodhya, Yadav seldom observed birthdays growing up, making the day particularly exciting for him now.

"I never celebrated my birthday before coming to Delhi in 2016. Now, my friends get more excited for my birthday than me," he added.

While 'leap day babies' like Pant, Yadav and Behere have their own special way of celebrating the rare day, Liz Duren from South Carolina in the US enjoys her tradition of throwing children's birthday parties, as reported by the New York Post.

The 55-year-old podcaster and local historian plans to throw an "ET-themed" party, based on the Hollywood film featuring a friendly alien. "When I turned 44, I threw my 10th birthday party. I had a magician and games," the news portal quoted her as saying.

But the leap year baby club is largely a lonely one as people born on this special day rarely find fellow leapers.

Pant, for example, has met only one such person when she was 12 – an accounting personnel at her school.

"While filling out some paperwork, he noticed my birthday and excitedly asked, 'you are also 29 born? We felt so excited and happy to meet because it is a rare coincidence," Pant said.Although she is not in touch with "sir" anymore, she remembers the feeling fondly.

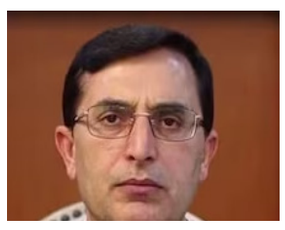
There are also a few lucky ones like Lana and Robyn McKeon from Dublin, Ireland.According to the Irish Independent news website, the siblings were born on 29 February but four years apart. Due to this oddity, the sisters have been invited to a party hosted by the lord mayor of Dublin as well as have made radio and television appearances.

—PTI

S Korea calls for unification on 1919 Japan uprising

SEOUL, 1 MAR

South Korea's President lambasted North Korea on Friday over what he called its repressive rule and vowed to achieve a free, unified Korean Peninsula, weeks after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un rejected the idea of peaceful unification and threatened to occupy the South in the event of war. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol spoke on 1 March Independence Movement Day, a holiday marking a 1919 Korean uprising against Japanese colonial rule. "Now, we must move toward a free, unified Korean Peninsula," Yoon said in a televised speech. "The North Korean regime relies solely on nuclear weapons and missiles while trapping its 26 million citizens in a quagmire of misery and despair." *—AP*



Barrister Gohar Khan reelected as Imran's party chairman

ISLAMABAD, 1 MAR

Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party has announced Barrister Gohar Khan's election for the chairman's post for a second time after the withdrawal of all other candidates from the organisational polls. The 71-year-old former-cricketer-turned-politician Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was scheduled to hold fresh organisational polls on 3 March after the result of its earlier intra-party election was annulled by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). Barrister Gohar, 45, was on Thursday elected as the party's chairman unopposed, becoming the only leader to have been elected to the post twice in the party, Geo News reported. The PTI's candidate for the prime minister's slot, Omar Ayub Khan, was also elected unopposed as the party's central general secretary, the party announced late on Thursday. *—PTI*

Biden, Meloni to hold talks on Ukraine

WASHINGTON, 1 MAR

President Joe Biden is set to host Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni on Friday for talks as the Democratic administration struggles to persuade House Republicans to pass legislation that would replenish aid to Ukraine and as both leaders face political headwinds at home. Biden has sought to assure European leaders that the US remains behind Ukraine even as he's been unable to win passage of a supplemental foreign aid package that includes USD 60 billion for Ukraine in addition to USD 35 billion for Israel and Taiwan. The legislation has passed the Senate, but Republican Speaker Mike Johnson has refused to put it up for a vote in the House. *—AP*

Soldier surrenders after 4 killed in Germany

BERLIN, 1 MAR

Four people were killed in shootings in northern Germany, police and prosecutors said Friday, and the suspect is a soldier who turned himself in. The four victims, including a child, were shot overnight at locations in the rural Scheessel and Bothel areas, near Hannover and Bremen, authorities said in a statement. The suspect, a German soldier, turned himself in to police shortly after the shooting, they said. His motive wasn't immediately clear, but they said that "a motive in the family environment cannot be ruled out". *—AP*

45 KILLED IN B'DESH BUILDING BLAZE

There were no fire safety measures at the mall building

DHAKA, 1 MAR

A massive fire that ripped through a seven-storey commercial building here overnight killed at least 45 people and injured 22 others, the health minister said on Friday, in one of the worst infernos that has hit Bangladesh in recent years.

The fire on Thursday night that engulfed the Green Cozy Cottage building in the capital's Baily Road area housed several restaurants and shops.

The fire broke out around 9.50 pm on Thursday at a popular restaurant named "Kacchi Bhai" on the building's first floor and quickly spread to the upper floors that had more restaurants and a garment shop, according to fire service officials.

There were no fire safety measures at the seven-storey shopping mall, authorities said, underlining that three notices were already served to the owners but no action was taken.

Health Minister Samanta Lal Sen said around 2 am that 33 bodies were brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and 10 others to the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery. Another victim died at the Police Hospital.

The condition of those injured is "critical", he told reporters at a briefing.

Another victim died around 7am while undergoing treatment at the intensive care unit (ICU) of DMCH.

Fire officials said 75 people, including 42 in unconscious state, were taken out of the seven-storey building. Thirteen fire service units were mobilised, the officials said.

The Minister, a burn wound specialist, said 22 people are being treated at both health facilities and their condition is "critical".

Doctors said some of the bodies were burned beyond recognition and feared that the death toll could rise.

Witnesses and officials said to escape the fire, people rushed to the upper floors. Many were rescued by firefighters using ladders, they added.

The fire originated from a gas leak or stove. The building has only one exit - the staircases, according to him.

Most of the people died as they jumped off the building or from burns or suffocation, said firefighters who brought the fire under control around 12.30 am.

The first death was reported around 1 am when the firefighters took the bodies one by one to a freezing truck waiting outside the building, local media reported.

A five-member committee has been formed to investigate the incident.

Fires in apartment buildings and factory complexes are common in Bangladesh due to lax enforcement of safety rules.

As many as 102 people were killed and 281 others sustained burn injuries in 27,624 fire incidents across the country in 2023, according to Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) headquarters. *—PTI*

Firefighters work to control a fire that broke out at a commercial complex in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

Iran votes in 1st election since massive hijab protest

DUBAI, 1 MAR

Iran began voting on Friday in its first parliamentary elections since the mass 2022 protests over its mandatory hijab laws after the death of Mahsa Amini, with questions looming over just how many people will turn out for the poll.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 84, cast one of the first votes in an election that also will see new members elected to the country's Assembly of Experts. The panel of clerics, who serve an eight-year term, is mandated to select a new supreme leader if Khamenei steps down or dies, giving their role increased importance with Khamenei's age.

Khamenei voted before a crowd of journalists in Tehran, his left hand slightly shaking as he took his ballot from his right, paralysed since a 1981 bombing. State television showed one woman nearby weeping as she filmed Khamenei with her mobile phone.

He urged people to vote as soon as possible in the election, saying that both Iran's friends and enemies were watching the turnout.

Initial election results are expected as soon as Saturday. Some 15,000 candidates are vying for a seat in the 290-member parliament, formally known as the Islamic Consultative Assembly. Terms run for four years, and five seats are reserved for Iran's religious minorities.

Under the law, the parliament has oversight over the executive branch, votes on treaties and handles other issues. In practice, absolute power in Iran rests with its supreme leader.

More recently, the parliament has focused on issues surrounding Iran's mandatory head covering, or hijab, for women after the 2022 death of 22-year-old Amini in police custody, which sparked nationwide protests.

The protests quickly escalated into calls to overthrow Iran's clerical rulers. A subsequent security crackdown killed over 500 people, with more than 22,000 detained. Calls for an election boycott have spread in recent weeks, including from imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi, a women's right activist, who called them a "sham." *—PTI*

President Ebrahim Raisi casts his ballot during the elections in Tehran, Iran on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

- The protests quickly escalated into calls to overthrow Iran's clerical rulers. A subsequent security crackdown killed over 500 people, with more than 22,000 detained. Calls for an election boycott have spread in recent weeks, including from imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges.

President Joe Biden meets with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson in the Oval Office of the White House **PHOTO: AP**

Navalny laid to rest weeks after death amid tight security

MOSCOW, 1 MAR

Relatives and supporters of Alexei Navalny are bidding farewell to the Opposition leader at a funeral Friday in southeastern Moscow, following a battle with authorities over the release of his body after his still-unexplained death in an Arctic penal colony.

His supporters say several churches in Moscow refused to hold the service before Navalny's team got permission from one in the capital's Maryino district, where he once lived before his 2020 poisoning, treatment in Germany and subsequent arrest on his return to Russia.

The Church of the Icon of the Mother of God Soothe My Sorrows, which agreed to hold the service, did not mention it on its social media page. Authorities lined the road from from a nearby subway station to the church with crowd-control barriers, and riot police deployed in big numbers early Friday.

A hearse set out with Navalny's body toward the church, his team said.

Burial was to follow in the nearby Borisovskoye Cemetery, where police also showed up in force.

Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, spent eight days trying to get authorities to release the body following his 16 February death at Penal Colony No. 3 in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 km northeast of Moscow.

Authorities originally said they couldn't turn over the body because they needed to conduct post-mortem tests. Navalnaya, 69, made a video appeal to President Vladimir Putin to release the body so she could bury her son with dignity.

Once it was released, at least one funeral director said he had been "forbidden" to work with Navalny's supporters, the spokeswoman for Navalny's team, Kira Yarmysh, said on social media. They also were unable to find a hearse for the funeral.

"Unknown people are calling up people and threatening them not to take Alexei's body anywhere," Yarmysh said Thursday. *—PTI*

US AVERTS LAST MINUTE SHUTDOWN WITH NEW BILL

WASHINGTON, 1 MAR

Congress passed another short-term spending measure Thursday that would keep one set of federal agencies operating through 8 March and another set through 22 March, avoiding a shutdown for parts of the federal government that would otherwise kick in Saturday.

The Bill now goes to President Joe Biden to be signed into law.

The short-term extension is the fourth in recent months, and many lawmakers expect it to be the last for the current fiscal year. House Speaker Mike Johnson said negotiators had completed six of the annual spending bills that fund federal agencies and had "almost final agreement on the others."

The House acted first Thursday. The vote to approve the extension was 320-99. It easily cleared the two-thirds majority needed for passage. Democrats overwhelmingly voted to avert a partial shutdown. But the vote was much more divided with Republicans, 113 in support and 97 against. The Senate then took up the bill and approved it during an evening vote of 77-13. *—AP*

Rally in PoK to protest against worsening living conditions

MUZAFFRABAD, 1 MAR

People in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) on Friday carried out a rally, expressing their anger over the deteriorating living condition in the occupied territory. During the rally, the protesters denounced the Pakistani administration over the capture of their land and water resources claiming that they are being used without the willingness of the people.

The protesters raised slogans, demanding Pakistan's administration and law enforcement agencies to vacate PoK. In addition, people shouted slogans stating their disagreement over capture of land and water resources by the Pakistani administration.

Ranging from the demand of proper educational setup in the area to the incapability of the administration to provide basic amenities to the general public, these protest have been going on from a long time.

Previously, there has been growing unrest in the regions of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir over Pakistan's negligent attitude towards the region. The Titri Note area in PoK recently witnessed massive protests.

During the protesters, hundreds of people demanded to cross over the border to reach the India's Poonch, to procure flour, claiming that Pakistan cannot provide them even essentials. During these protests, a senior leader of the Jammu Kashmir National Awami Party underlined the condition of Pakistan and said that "they have nothing left with themselves, hence they will not solve any of our problems. They are bankrupt themselves and they are just making fake promises. They must now give flour to us, many people are waiting on Tetri Note, it is their mistake if they think, that we are satisfied. We know that why they have stopped our flour; it is because we raise our voices for our rights." *—ANI*

During the protesters, hundreds of people demanded to cross over the border to reach the India's Poonch **PHOTO: ANI**

EUROPEAN INFLATION EASES TO 2.6% AS ENERGY PRICES FALL, FOOD INFLATION SLOWS

FRANKFURT, 1 MAR

The inflation that has ravaged the European economy eased again in February, falling to 2.6 per cent as high interest rates, moderating oil and gas prices, and sluggish growth held back price increases in stores.

February's figure for the 20 countries that use the euro currency compares to 2.8 per cent from January, the European Union's statistical agency Eurostat said Friday.

Inflation is now far below its peak of 10.6 per cent in October 2022, which it hit after Russia cut off most supplies of natural gas and sent energy prices through the roof.

But the return of inflation to 2 per cent, the goal set by the European Central Bank, is taking time. Food inflation eased to 4 per cent from 5.6 per cent, offering some relief to people on modest incomes who spend more of their pay on necessities than the well-off. *—PTI*

Sardar Ayaz elected Pak Speaker

ISLAMABAD, 1 MAR

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, a senior leader from the party headed by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, was on Friday elected as the Speaker of the newly-formed National Assembly.

PML-N's Sadiq secured 199 votes out of a total of 291 votes cast, Dawn.com reported.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) candidate beat his rival Amir Dogar, who got only 91 votes amid commotion caused by the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) members. Dogar was backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

After the counting of votes was complete, outgoing speaker Raja Pervaiz Ashraf said that a total of 291 votes were cast, out of which one was "invalid" and the rest declared "valid," the report said. *—PTI*

Sardar Sadiq **PHOTO: DAWN**

US Moon lander fades into dark after mission

CAPE CANAVERAL, 1 MAR

The first US spacecraft to land on the moon since the Apollo astronauts fell silent on Thursday, a week after breaking a leg at touchdown and tipping over near the lunar south pole.

Intuitive Machines' lander, Odysseus, lasted longer than the company anticipated after it ended up on its side with hobbled solar power and communication.

The end came as flight controllers received one last photo from Odysseus and commanded its computer and power systems to standby. That way, the lander can wake up in another two to three weeks - if it survives the bitterly cold lunar night. Intuitive Machines spokesman Josh Marshall said these final steps drained the lander's batteries and put Odysseus "down for a long nap."

Before losing power, Odysseus sent back what Intuitive Machines called "a fitting farewell transmission."

Taken just before touchdown, the picture shows the bottom of the lander on the moon's pockmarked surface, with a tiny crescent Earth and a small sun in the background.

The lander was originally intended to last about a week at the moon. Houston-based Intuitive Machines became the first private business to land a spacecraft on the moon without crashing when Odysseus touched down 22 February. Only five countries had achieved that since the 1960s, including Japan, which made a sideways landing last month. *—AP*

FIRE SEEN FROM SPACE

Texas sees largest wildfire, people helpless

STINNETT, 1 MAR

As the largest wildfire in Texas history engulfed his town, Danny Phillips was left helpless.

"We had to watch from a few miles away as our neighborhood burned," he said, his voice trembling with emotion.

In his hard-hit town of Stinnett, population roughly 1,600, families like his who evacuated from the Smokehouse Creek fire returned Thursday to devastating scenes: Melted street signs and charred frames of cars and trucks. Homes reduced to piles of ash and rubble. An American flag propped up outside a destroyed house.

Phillips' one-story home was still standing, but several of his neighbours weren't so fortunate.

Stinnett's destruction was a reminder that, even as snow fell on Thursday and helped firefighters, crews are racing to stamp out the blaze ahead of increased temperatures and winds forecast in the coming days.

Already, the Smokehouse Creek fire has killed two people and left behind a desolate landscape of scorched prairie, dead cattle and burned-out homes in the Texas Panhandle.

The blaze grew to nearly 4,400 sq km on Thursday. It merged with another fire and is just 3% contained, according to the Texas A&M Forest Service. The largest of several major fires burning in the rural Panhandle section of the state, it has also crossed into Oklahoma.

Gray skies loomed over huge scars of blackened earth in a rural area dotted with scrub brush, ranchland, rocky canyons and oil rigs. Firefighter Lee Jones was helping douse the smoldering wreckage of homes in Stinnett to keep them from reigniting when the weather starts turning Friday and continues into the weekend.

"The snow helps," said Jones, who was among a dozen firefighters called in from Lubbock to help.

Authorities have not said what ignited the fires, but strong winds, dry grass and unseasonably warm temperatures fed them.

"The rain and the snow is beneficial right now — we're using it to our advantage," Texas A&M Forest Service spokesman Juan Rodriguez said of the Smokehouse Creek fire.

Authorities said 4,248 sq km of the fire were on the Texas side of the border. Previously, the largest fire in recorded state history was the 2006 East Amarillo Complex fire, which burned about 3,630 sq km and resulted in 13 deaths.

Two women are the only confirmed deaths so far this week. But with flames still menacing a wide area, authorities had yet to conduct a thorough search for victims or tally the numerous homes and other structures damaged or destroyed.

Cindy Owen was driving in Texas' Hemphill County south of Canadian on Tuesday afternoon when she encountered fire or smoke, said Sgt Chris Ray of the state's Department of Public Safety. She got out of her truck, and flames overtook her. *—PTI*

The satellite image shows an overview of burned areas with clouds above after the wildfires in the town of Fritch, Texas **PHOTO: AP**

PHOTO: PTI

Paytm shares jump 5 per cent

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns and operates Paytm, on Friday jumped 5 per cent after the company said the board has approvethe discontinuation of inter-company pacts with Paytm Payments Bank to reduce dependencies.The stock climbed 4.39 per cent to Rs 423 on the BSE after falling in the past three trading days. At the NSE, it jumped 4.99 per cent to Rs 423.45. Amid RBI's action on its associate firm, One97 Communications on Friday said the board has approved the discontinuation of intercompany pacts with Paytm Payments Bank to reduce dependencies. The move assumes significance as Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) is under the RBI's lens over persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns—*PTI*

Tata Motors sales rise 8 pc at 86,406 units

NEW DELHI,2 MARCH

Tata Motors on Friday reported an 8 per cent rise in its total wholesales to 86,406 units in February as compared with 79,705 units in the same month last year. The total domestic sales stood at 84,834 units last month against 78,006 units last month, a growth of 9 per cent, Tata Motors said in a regulatory filing. Sales of passenger vehicles, including electric vehicles, in the domestic market, were at 51,321 units as compared to 43,140 units in the year-ago month, up 19 per cent, it added.Total commercial vehicle sales declined by 4 per cent last month to 35,085 units from 36,565 units in February 2023, it added. —*PTI*

GST grows 12.5 pc to over ₹1.68 lakh cr in February

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

The GST collection in February grew 12.5 per cent to over Rs 1.68 lakh crore, buoyed by domestic transactions, the finance ministry said on Friday. The total gross GST collection for the current fiscal (April 2023-February 2024) stands at Rs 18.40 lakh crore, 11.7 per cent higher than the mopup for the same period last fiscal. The average monthly gross collection for the current fiscal stood at Rs 1.67 lakh crore, exceeding Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the last fiscal. This growth was driven by a 13.9 per cent rise in GST from domestic transactions and an 8.5 per cent increase in GST from import of goods.—*PTI*

Mahindra wholesales rise 24 pc in Feb at 72,923 units

NEW DELHI, 20 FEB

Mahindra & Mahindra on Friday said its total sales increased 24 per cent to 72,923 units in February. The company's total dispatches to its dealers stood at 58,801 units in February 2023.The Mumbai-based auto major's passenger vehicle sales in the domestic market rose 40 per cent to 42,401 units last month against 30,358 in February last year, the auto major said in a statement."In our endeavour to make some of our SUVs available faster to consumers, we launched the Scorpio N Z8S variant and the Thar Earth edition this month," Mahindra & Mahindra President (Automotive Division) Veejay Nakra said.The company's total tractor sales last month stood at 21,672 units, a dip of 16 per cent as compared to 25,791 units in the same month last year.—*PTI*

Sensex, Nifty hit record high levels on impressive GDP data

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,139.04 points to 73,639.34

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty hit their all-time high levels on Friday helped by impressive GDP data and fresh foreign fund inflows.

Also, a rally in global markets added to the positive momentum in the equity markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,139.04 points to 73,639.34 -- its all-time peak -- in the late afternoon trade. The Nifty climbed 335.85 points to reach its new record peak of 22,318.65.

Among the Sensex firms, Tata Steel jumped over 5 per cent while JSW Steel quoted with a gain of nearly 4 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Titan, ICICI Bank and Tata Motors were the other major gainers.

HCL Technologies, Infosys and Tech Mahindra were the laggards.

India's economy grew by better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023 -- the fastest pace in one-and-half years.

The growth rate in October-December was higher than 7.6 per cent in the previous three years, and it helped take the estimate for the current fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) to 7.6 per cent, according to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday.

The main factor influencing the market today will be the better-than-expected Q3 GDP growth number which has come at an impressive 8.4 per cent, said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.

"The impressive GDP numbers provide the fundamental support to the bull market," he added.

India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a five-month high in February amid a sharper uptick in factory production and sales, supported by both domestic and external demand, a monthly survey said on Friday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 in February, pointing to the strongest improvement in the health of the sector since September 2023.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong were quoting with gains.

The US markets ended in the green on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Thursday as they bought equities worth Rs 3,568.11 crore, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 195.42 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 72,500.30 on Thursday. The Nifty gained 31.65 points or 0.14 per cent to 21,982.80.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.33 per cent to USD 82.19 a barrel. —*PTI*

India's economy grew by better-than-expected 8.4 per cent in the final three months of 2023 *PHOTO: PTI*

- Among the Sensex firms, Tata Steel jumped over 5 per cent while JSW Steel quoted with a gain of nearly 4 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Titan, ICICI Bank and Tata Motors were the other major gainers.

FM SAYS

'Direct Benefit Transfer worth ₹34 L cr eased'

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said Direct Benefit Transfer of Rs 34 lakh crore has been facilitated by the Public Financial Management System (PFMS) and asked accounts officers to further enhance efficiency and transparency of the system.

In a written message to the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) and the Indian Civil Accounts Organisation (ICAO) on the occasion of the 48th Civil Accounts Day, Sitharaman said PFMS has been the cornerstone of establishing an efficient fund flow system alongside a robust payment and accounting network.

She also highlighted that 1,081 different schemes, including those of state governments, have been seamlessly integrated into the DBT.

PFMS, which is developed and implemented by the Controller General of Accounts under the Department of Expenditure, has played a pivotal role in revolutionising the financial administration of the government.

"This has not only facilitated a real-time, reliable, and meaningful management information system but also has paved the way for a more transparent, accountable, and people-centric governance...," Sitharaman said.

She further said that initiatives by the Central Pension Accounting Office, under the office of CGA such as the Pensioners Facilitation Cell, Web Responsive Pensioners Service, Pension Adalats, and recently developed Dirghayu pensioners' mobile app, have helped more than 12 lakh pensioners with easy access to addressing their grievances promptly. —*PTI*

- Sitharaman said PFMS has been the cornerstone of establishing an efficient fund flow system alongside a robust accounting network

Govt hikes windfall tax on crude petrol, cuts levy on diesel

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

The government has hiked windfall tax on domestically produced crude oil to Rs 4,600 per tonne from Rs 3,300 per tonne with effect from Friday.

The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED).

The SAED on export of diesel, however, has been cut to nil from Rs 1.50 a litre, according to an official notification.

On petrol and jet fuel or ATF, the levy has been retained at nil.

cIndia first imposed windfall profit taxes on 1 July, 2022, joining a host of nations that tax supernormal profits of energy companies.

- The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED).The SAED on export of diesel, however, has been cut to nil from Rs 1.50 a litre, according to an official notification.On petrol and jet fuel or ATF, the levy has been retained at nil. The new rates are effective from 1 March

The tax rates are reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks. —*PTI*

GDP LIKELY TO GROW

Will stick to 5.8 pc fiscal deficit pegged in RE for FY23: Official

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

The government expects the fiscal deficit to be within the revised estimates of 5.8 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal ending March, an official said on Friday.

The revised estimates (RE) had pegged the fiscal deficit at Rs 17.35 lakh crore or 5.8 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal.

"We hope to stick to 5.8 per cent fiscal deficit in the current fiscal. I don't think that GDP numbers released on Thursday will lead to any change in the deficit target," an official said.

The data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Thursday showed that India's economy will grow 7.6 per cent in the current fiscal, higher than 7.3 per cent pegged earlier.

India's nominal GDP is expected to grow 9.1 per cent in 2023-24, as per the second advance estimate for GDP released on Thursday. The nominal GDP was assumed to be 8.9 per cent at the time of budget making.

Although the nominal GDP is projected to grow faster than the earlier projection, it will be lower in absolute terms because of revisions in earlier years.

In absolute terms, the nominal GDP is seen at Rs 293.89 lakh crore compared with the revised projection of Rs 296.57 lakh crore in 2022-23. —*PTI*

Revised estimates had pegged the fiscal deficit at Rs 17.35 lakh crore or 5.8 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

WTO holds meet, talks on agri, fisheries issues

ABU DHABI,1 MAR

The meeting of the highest decision-making body of the WTO on Friday entered the fifth day with key members including India, the US, and the EU holding talks to iron out differences on issues such as agriculture, fisheries subsidies, and duty moratorium on e-commerce trade.

The 13th Ministerial Conference (MC), which was to end on 29 February, extended for a day as developing and developed nations were unable to find common ground on these key issues.The members are talking to end the impasse and so far things have not moved much, an official said.

"There are nine countries in the green room meeting including Brazil and China. The negotiations have been extended as WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is pushing for outcomes," the official said.

WTO spokesman Ismaila Dieng said that the ministers continue to be engaged in intensive and difficult discussions on a package of agreements for adoption at MC13.

"As a result, in order to give more time for negotiations, the Formal Closing Session of MC13 has now been postponed to 5 pm UAE time on Friday, 1 March," Dieng said. —*PTI*

Bitcoin breaches $63,000 threshold for 1st time since 2021

NEW DELHI, 29 FEB

Mysterious Billboards Hint at Upcoming Bitcoin Halving Campaign Earlier this month, Bitcoin crossed the historic $63,000 price threshold for the first time since December 2021.

As Bitcoin continues its rally, curious citizens in Istanbul and Manila were greeted with an unusual sight on 26 February - a large billboard advertising a Bitcoin Halving 2024 promo video with the statement "Bitcoin Halving, a story of Less is more".

The mysterious advertisement piqued public interest and speculation over who was behind it.

What is Bitcoin Halving?

Occurring roughly every four years, Bitcoin Halving refers to a built-in mechanism that cuts Bitcoin's block reward - the amount of Bitcoin miners receive for processing blockchain transactions - by 50 per cent. The upcoming halving, expected in 2024, will reduce the block reward from 6.25 bitcoins to 3.125 bitcoins.

This predictable tightening of issuance reduces the inflation rate over time, making Bitcoin an increasingly scarce digital asset, like "digital gold."

CoinEx Revealed as Creator of Teaser Ads

Given the importance of Bitcoin halvings to the crypto space, the mysterious outdoor ads signaled someone's big marketing play around the anticipated 2024 event. Shortly after the billboards appeared, CoinEx, a global cryptocurrency exchange, claimed ownership of the advertisement on their social media channels. The outdoor advertising and subsequent video have sparked debate - is this merely an attention-grabbing marketing ploy by CoinEx, or a genuine homage to a genuine tribute to the monumental Bitcoin halving event?

The exchange offers a professional, robust, and seamless trading experience with 880+ cryptocurrencies available for trading, tailored for veteran and novice users alike. —*PTI*

Revised estimates had pegged the fiscal deficit at Rs 17.35 lakh crore or 5.8 per cent of GDP in the current fiscal *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

- The upcoming halving, expected in 2024, will reduce the block reward from 6.25 bitcoins to 3.125 bitcoins.

Adani group to invest ₹75,000 crore in MP

UJJAIN, 1 MAR

Adani group will invest about Rs 75,000 crore in Madhya Pradesh in power plants, building Mahakaal Expressway, and setting up cement grinding units in coming years, a top group executive said on Friday.

The apples-to-airport group has already invested almost Rs 18,000 crore in the state and will continue investing in diverse sectors, said Pranav Adani, Managing Director (Agro, Oil and Gas) and Director of Adani Enterprises at the Regional Industry Conclave here.

"Currently, our presence in Madhya Pradesh spans a wide range of sectors - from roads, cement, and natural resources to thermal power, renewable energy and power transmission," he said.

Of this, the group will invest Rs 5,000 crore in building the Mahakaal Expressway from Ujjain to Bhopal, through Indore.

"We will also invest another Rs 5,000 crore to set up a 4-million-tonnes-per-annum clinker unit in Chorgadi and two cement grinding units, in Dewas and Bhopal, with a combined capacity of 8-million-tonnes-per-annum," he said.

It will invest Rs 4,600 crore to expand its presence in food processing, logistics, and agri-logistics, and defence manufacturing. —*PTI*

₹8,470 CR STILL WITH PEOPLE

RBI says 97.62 pc of ₹2,000 notes returned

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said nearly 97.62 per cent of the Rs 2,000 bank notes have returned to the banking system, and only about Rs 8,470 crore worth of the withdrawn notes are still with the public.

On 19 May, 2023, the RBI announced the withdrawal of Rs 2,000 denomination bank notes from circulation.

"The total value of Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation, which was Rs 3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on 19 May, 2023, when the withdrawal of Rs 2000 banknotes was announced, has declined to Rs 8,470 crore at the close of business on 29 February, 2024," the RBI said in a statement.

Thus, 97.62 per cent of the Rs 2,000 banknotes in circulation as of 19 May, 2023, have since been returned, it added.

"The Rs 2,000 banknotes continue to be legal tender," the RBI added.

People can deposit and/or exchange Rs 2,000 bank notes at the 19 RBI offices across the country. People can also send Rs 2,000 bank notes through India Post from any post office to any of the RBI Issue Offices for credit to their bank accounts in India.

Public and entities holding such notes were initially asked to either exchange or deposit them in bank accounts by 30 September, 2023. The deadline was later extended to 7 October, 2023. Deposit and exchange services at bank branches were discontinued on 7 October, 2023.

Starting 8 October, 2023, individuals have been provided with the choice of either exchanging the currency or having the equivalent sum credited to their bank accounts at the 19 offices of the RBI.

The 19 RBI offices depositing/exchanging the bank notes are in Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Belapur, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Chennai, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Jammu, Kanpur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai, Nagpur, New Delhi, Patna and Thiruvananthapuram.

The Rs 2,000 bank notes were introduced in November 2016, following the demonetisation of the then-prevailing Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 bank notes. —*PTI*

97.62 per cent of the Rs 2,000 banknotes in circulation as of 19 May, 2023, have since been returned *PHOTO: PTI*

- On 19 May, 2023, the RBI announced the withdrawal of Rs 2,000 denomination bank notes from circulation

Manufacturing sector growth hits high

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

India's manufacturing sector growth climbed to a five-month high in February amid a sharper uptick in factory production and sales, supported by both domestic and external demand, a monthly survey said on Friday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 56.5 in January to 56.9 in February, pointing to the strongest improvement in the health of the sector since September 2023.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

According to the survey, production rose at the fastest pace in five months and fuelled the quickest increase in sales since last September and the strongest expansion in new export orders for 21 months.

"The HSBC final India Manufacturing PMI indicates that production growth continued to be strong, supported by both domestic and external demand," said Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC.

Despite the uptick in growth momentum, manufacturing employment in India was little-changed. "Goods producers mentioned that payroll numbers were sufficient for current requirements," the survey said.

On the inflation front, purchasing cost inflation retreated to a 43-month low, with selling charges increasing to a lesser extent as a result. The input costs witnessed the slowest rise in over three-and-a-half years. —*PTI*

PHOTO: IANS

Praggnanandhaa blunders again, goes down to Rapport

PRAGUE, 1 MAR

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa blundered for the second day running and lost to Richard Rapport of Romania in the third round of the Prague Masters Chess tournament underway here.After briefly going ahead of Viswanathan Anand and attaining the top Indian status in the live rating list, this double blow cost the Indian dearly, and now a lot of hard work remains in the last six rounds of the 10-player round-robin contest.It was drama all over, as Praggnanandhaa was not the only one to blow away his chances. Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan turned the tables on local star David Navara from a nearly hopeless position when the latter failed to keep his nerves under pressure after attaining a winning position.—*AP*

PHOTO: IANS

Lahiri set to be back at Hero Indian Open after five years

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Star golfer and former champion Anirban Lahiri is set to return at the Hero Indian Open, the country's National Open which will have an enhanced prize money of USD 2.25 million this year.Part of the Asian Swing, the Indian Open will have 144 players, including 33 Indians, competing for the top prize from March 28 to 31 at the DLF Golf & Country Club in Gurugram. Out of the USD 2.5 million (Rs 18.65 crore) prize purse, the winner will receive a handsome USD 382,500 (Rs 3.17 crore approx) with the runner-up picking up USD 247,500 (Rs 2.05 crore approx).—*AP*

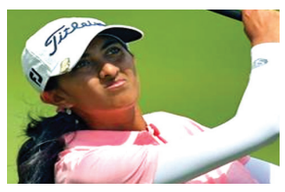


PHOTO: IANS

Aditi Ashok jumps into Top-10 in Singapore

SINGAPORE, 1 MAR

A bogey-free three-under 69 in the second round saw India's Aditi Ashok move into the Top 10 at the HSBC Women's World Championship here on Friday.The World No. 40, who is getting ready for another shot at an Olympic medal that she missed by a whisker in Tokyo, birdied three times on the fifth, 12th, and 16th and parred the rest of the holes to be placed Tied-9th in the field.—*AP*

PHOTO: AFP

Andrey Rublev handed shock disqualification

DUBAI, 1 MAR

Russia's Andrey Rublev was disqualified from the Dubai ATP tournament for allegedly using obscene language in an angry tirade at a line umpire on Friday, gifting Alexander Bublik a place in the final.Most of the deciding set was dominated by arguments between Bublik and chair umpire Miriam Bley over the timing of the introduction of new balls. Rublev insisted he spoke in English and did not use foul language, but the line umpire stuck to his story. —AP

Kapil backs BCCI strictness on domestic cricket

Few players will suffer but let it be

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

"A few players will suffer, but let it be," said legendary former India captain Kapil Dev on Friday as he backed the BCCI's decision to terminate central contracts for lack of commitment to domestic cricket, calling it a much-needed step to protect marquee first-class events like the Ranji Trophy.

Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer were on Wednesday excluded from the BCCI's central contracts after ignoring the board's diktat to play in the Ranji Trophy. The decision evoked mixed reactions with some former players like Kirti Azad and Irfan Pathan backing the out-of-favour duo.

Kapil refrained from taking names but said the BCCI's decision to assert the importance of domestic cricket was long overdue.

"Yes, few players will suffer, kuch logon ko taqleef hogi, hone do lekin desh se badhkar koi nahi hai (some people will feel hurt but let it be because nobody is bigger than the country). Well done," he said.

"I congratulate the BCCI for taking the much-needed step to protect the status of domestic cricket. I was sad to see domestic cricket being given the skip by players once they had established themselves in international cricket," the captain of the 1983 World Cup-winning side observed in his statement.

The BCCI, while announcing the central contracts, urged the players to give due importance to domestic competitions.

The 25-year-old Kishan did not turn up for Jharkhand throughout the team's campaign in the Ranji Trophy despite not being on national duty after leaving the tour of South Africa in December citing personal reasons. He instead focussed on preparing for the IPL next month for his franchise Mumbai Indians.

Iyer, on the other hand, did not make himself available for Mumbai's Ranji quarterfinal against Baroda after being excluded from the Indian team after the second Test against England. He, however, has been picked for Mumbai's Ranji semifinal against Tamil Nadu starting on 2 March.

"It was high time the message was given and this strong step by the BCCI will go a long way in restoring the prestige of domestic cricket," he added.

Kapil asserted that it was the duty of established stars to play domestic cricket as they owe their success to their respective states. —*PTI*

Kapil Dev PHOTO: PTI

HE'S THE NEW ASHWIN: VAUGHAN ON SHOAIB BASHIR

LONDON, 1 MAR

Michael Vaughan and Shoaib Bashir PHOTO: X

Former England captain Michael Vaughan feels England have discovered a "world-class superstar" in young off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, who has the skills to emulate the success of India's Ravichandran Ashwin.Despite England's five-wicket loss in Ranchi, 20-year-old Bashir, playing only his second Test, impressed as he returned with a match haul of eight wickets. His magnificent performance included a five-wicket haul in the first innings.Ashwin, on the other hand, is regarded as one of the best off-spinners in the history of Test cricket.The senior spinner recently became only the second Indian bowler to snare 500 wickets in the longest format and is set for his 100th Test in Dharamsala next week against England."One of the great weeks, celebrating another world-class superstar that we've unearthed, Shoaib Bashir. That's what we're celebrating. Second Test match, he eight wickets, he's the new Ravi Ashwin, and we've unearthed him."So, we're celebrating a new superstar in English cricket," Vaughan said on Club Prairie Fire's YouTube channel. —*AP*

Nathan Lyon shines as Australia leads by 217 runs vs New Zealand at stumps PHOTO: AFP

Kiwis hit back at Australia after Williamson run out

WELLINGTON, 1 MAR

The almost comical run out of Kane Williamson for a second-ball duck was one of many setbacks suffered by New Zealand on the second day of the first test Friday as it fell 217 runs behind Australia.

That was until the very end of the day when Australia batted for a second time after passing up the chance to make New Zealand follow on. Tim Southee dismissed Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne to have Australia 13-2 in its second innings after it had led by 204 in the first.

At stumps, Usman Khawaja was 5 not out and nightwatchman Nathan Lyon was 6 not out. Lyon was dropped at slip by Tim Southee off the last ball of the day. Smith was out for a duck to the third ball of the innings, bowled by Southee, and Labuschagne fell to Southee in the fifth over for 2. After falling for 1 in the first innings, it was Labuschagne's lowest aggregate score in a test in his career. They were the 12th and 13th wickets to fall in the day which mostly had not gone New Zealand's way. First, New Zealand needed more than a full session to claim one wicket and end Australia's first innings. In that time Cameron Green and Josh Hazlewood put on 116 runs to increase Australia's total from 279-9 after the first day to 383. Green finished 174 not out.

Australia 383 (Green 174*, Marsh 40, Henry 5-70) and 13 for 2 (Lyon 6*, Khawaja 5*, Southee 2-5) lead New Zealand 179 (Phillips 71, Henry 42, Lyon 4-43, Hazlewood 2-55) by 217 runs. —*AP*

UP Warriorz thrash GG by six wickets

BENGALURU, 1 MAR

Uttar Pradesh Warriorz earned their second victory of this WPL season, defeating Gujarat Giants by six wickets here on Friday.

Chasing 143, Australia's Grace Harris (60 not out; 33 balls), played some big and entertaining shots as the target was achieved in 15.4 overs.

The 30-year-old right-hander hit nine boundaries and two huge sixes and shared an unbeaten 53-run partnership with Deepti Sharma (17 not out).

Gujarat Giants batters struggled to get going against spinners on a slow surface, with Phoebe Litchfield (35) emerging as their highest scorer. Sophie Ecclestone took three wickets for 20 runs.

Brief scores: Gujarat Giants 142 for 5 in 20 overs (Phoebe Litchfield 35, Ashleigh Gardner 30; Sophie Ecclestone 3/20) lost to Uttar Pradesh Warriorz 143 for 4 in 15.4 overs (Grace Harris 60 not out, Alyssa Healy 33; Tanuja Kanwar 2/23) by six wickets. —*PTI*

Uttar Pradesh Warriorz earned their second victory of this WPL season PHOTO: PTI

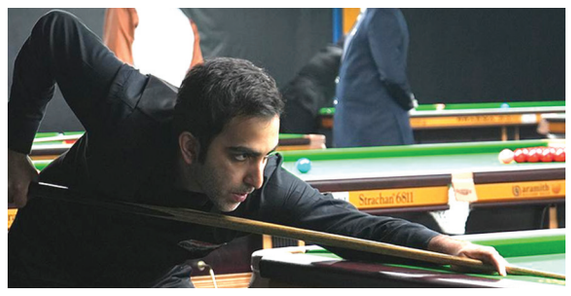
Advani, Rawat to clash in CCI snooker semis

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Multiple world champion Pankaj Advani of Bengaluru eked out a hard-fought 6-4 win over Mumbai's Nitesh Madaan in a best-of-11-frame quarterfinal match at the CCI Snooker Classic here on Friday.

Advani, India's most illustrious player with 27 world titles, secured a 61-51, 78-8, 75-2, 57-68, 4-61, 15-71, 89-9, 108-9, 54-65, 102-0 win against Madaan in a thrilling last-eight match at the CCI's Sir Wilson Jones billiards hall here. In the semifinals, defending champion Advani will meet Bombay Gymkhana's Laxman Rawat, the lone local challenger who fought hard to overcome a spirited Pushinder Singh 6-5 (68-66, 70-33, 28-81, 80-23, 54-82, 50-53, 40-73, 23-68, 83-39, 71-36, and 85-0) in a nerve-wracking quarterfinal.

Advani came from behind to win the first frame. Madaan, who also practices at the Bombay Gymkhana, rolled in a break of 50 but Advani made a strong reply, compiling a 54 to snatch the opening frame. —*PTI*



Pankaj Advani PHOTO: PTI

Ireland script its maiden Test win

ABU DHABI, 1 FEB

Nearly seven years after they were granted Test status, Ireland secured their maiden win in the longest format, defeating Afghanistan by six wickets in a one-off Test here on Friday.

Ireland skipper Andy Balbirne anchored the 111-run chase in their second essay with an unbeaten 58 off 96 balls after pacer Mark Adair's eight-wicket match haul (5/39 and 3/56) to secure their first-ever win in eight Tests. Opting to bat, Afghanistan's first innings had lasted just 54.5 overs, folding up for 155 with Adair returning with his maiden five-wicket haul, taking advantage of the swinging conditions at the Tolerance Oval here.

He was ably supported by Craig Young (2/31), Curtis Campher (2/13), and Barry McCarthy (1/28). If not for the patient opening knock of 53 by Ibrahim Zadran and the resistance shown by Karim Janat (41 not out) towards the end, Afghanistan would have ended up with a much lower first-innings score.

Brief Scores: Afghanistan 155 (Ibrahim Zadran 53; Mark Adair 5/39) and 218 (Hashmatullah Shahidi 55; Craig Young 3/24, Barry McCarthy 3/48, Adair 3/56) lose to Ireland 263 (Paul Stirling 52; Zia 5/64) and 111/4 (Andy Balbirnie 58 not out) by six wickets.—*AP*

Ireland players celebrate PHOTO: AFP

Williams brothers lead Bilbao into Cup final PHOTO: AFP

Williams brothers lead Bilbao into Cup final

DUBAI, 1 MAR

First-half goals from brothers Inaki and Nico Williams sent Athletic Bilbao on their way to a 3-0 win 4-0 on aggregate over Atletico Madrid on Thursday and into the Copa del Rey final.

Bilbao led 1-0 from the first leg in Madrid and quickly doubled that when Inaki Williams was teed up by his younger brother to put them one up on the night. Three minutes before half-time, the roles were reversed with Inaki providing the assist for Nico Williams to give the Basques a three-goal cushion. Gorka Guruzeta, who has already netted 10 times in La Liga this season, added a third just after the hour to seal the tie.

Bilbao are the second most successful team in the history of the Copa del Rey, their 23 titles behind only Barcelona's 31, their most recent coming in 2020-21. The showpiece at La Cartuja in Seville on April 6 will be their 40th final and first against 2003 winners Real Mallorca who edged past Real Sociedad on penalties earlier in the week. —*AP*

Tebas hopes Greenwood will stay in La Liga

DHARAMSALA, 29 FEB

Greenwood PHOTO: AFP

La Liga president Javier Tebas hopes that Manchester United's on-loan striker Mason Greenwood extends his stay in Spain after an impressive spell with Getafe.

The 22-year-old joined Getafe in September with United saying they wanted to avoid him becoming a distraction despite all criminal charges being dropped following allegations, which he denied, of assault and attempted rape.United's new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe said last week that the club might look at Greenwood's situation again, but Tebas is keen to keep the player in La Liga.

"I am a lawyer," Tebas was quoted as saying by the BBC after he spoke at the Financial Times Business of Football Conference."If someone came out of a legal case innocent there is nothing else to say.

He is doing really well as a player and I hope he continues to stay in Spanish football.

—*AP*

RANJI TROPHY SEMIFINAL

Iyer in the spotlight as Mumbai takes on TN

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Out-of-favour India batter Shreyas Iyer will be motivated to prove a point and serve a timely reminder of his skillset as he gets back to domestic action when the record 41-time champions Mumbai take on Tamil Nadu in the Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Saturday.

Dropped from the Indian Test side and discarded from BCCI's list of contracted players after he did not make himself available for the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal due to groin and back trouble, Iyer has recovered completely to join Mumbai for the key clash.

Iyer would be key in Mumbai's scheme of things, especially against Tamil Nadu's quality spin bowling, which has been one of their key weapons this season.

Skipper R Sai Kishore (47 wickets) and fellow left-arm spinner S Ajith Ram (41) are perched atop the list of highest wicket-takers, against whom Iyer and Co. will have a great opportunity to make a strong statement.

The semifinal promises to be an enthralling battle between Tamil Nadu's persistent and disciplined bowlers and their batters who have piled up big runs this season versus Mumbai's all-round strength.

Mumbai has made it to the semifinals riding on timely performances from different players barring skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who has just one fifty to show from six matches.

None of the Mumbai bowlers has even made it to the top 10 in the list of wicket-takers Mohit Avasthi (32) is at 13th yet they find themselves in the final four with their bowlers sharing the workload quite well.

Both Mumbai and Tamil Nadu are coming off impressive wins at the quarterfinal stage.

Young Musheer Khan's unbeaten 203 allowed Mumbai a slender lead which swelled to an insurmountable 605 courtesy of a historic show from tailenders Tanush Kotian and Tushar Deshpande against Baroda. While Tamil Nadu stopped defending champions Saurashtra.

A standout feature in Tamil Nadu's impressive run this year has been the fact that they have bowled out each of their opponents twice in all Ranji matches this season irrespective of the outcome.

Both Mumbai and Tamil Nadu have lost only one match each. While Tamil Nadu only rose to find their best form after an away defeat to Gujarat in their season-opener, Mumbai's narrow loss to Uttar Pradesh only proved to be a minor blip.

It remains to be seen if N Jagadeesan (821 runs) rediscovers his form which helped him register consecutive scores of 245 not out and 321 earlier in the tournament. The right-hander has not crossed fifty in his last seven innings.

—*PTI*

Shreyas Iyer will be motivated to prove a point PHOTO: PTI

- Out-of-favour India batter Shreyas Iyer will be motivated to prove a point and serve a timely reminder of his skillset as he gets back to domestic action when the record 41-time champions Mumbai take on Tamil Nadu in the Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Saturday